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EVER THE
FAITH ENDURES
BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

JIM FITZPATRICK

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A MAGAZINE OF THE WEIRD AND UNUSUAL

FANTASY TALES

Volume
3

CONTENTS FOR
SUMMER, 1980

Number
6

FRONT COVER DESIGN	Jim FitzPatrick
<i>Copyright (c) 1978 Jim FitzPatrick from The Book of Conquests</i>	
EVER THE FAITH ENDURES	Manly Wade Wellman 3
<i>What eldritch secret lives on inside the old Belstone house? A complete novelette by a Master of the Macabre</i>	
THE WIND-WALKER	Brian Lumley 10
<i>Verses</i>	
LAIR OF THE WHITE WOLF	J. R. Schifino 11
<i>A condemned witch is rescued by The Wolf of Provonia</i>	
THE BLADES OF HELL	Don Herron 19
<i>Verses</i>	
DREAMS MAY COME	H. Warner Munn 20
<i>What if it was possible to go back and change the past?</i>	
THE ELEMENTALS	Frances Garfield 28
<i>Only a cat and two ghosts can oppose a group of daemons</i>	
THE LAST TRICK	Dave Reeder 34
<i>Something dark and deadly hungers beneath the city</i>	
THE CAULDRON	35
<i>Our readers exchange opinions about the magazine</i>	
THE STORY OF THE BROWN MAN	Darrell Schweitzer 39
<i>The Brown Man brought joy and the knowledge of the Old Gods</i>	
BONE-YOWL	Steve Eng 45
<i>Verses</i>	
BACK COVER DESIGN	Jim Pitts
<i>"After Hannes Bok"</i>	

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NOTE - Manuscripts should be addressed to David Sutton, 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7TE, England. Communications and examples of artwork should be sent to Stephen Jones, 33 Wren House, Tachbrook Estate, London, SW1V 3QD, England. All contributions must be accompanied by return postage. The publishers are not responsible for the loss or return of manuscripts or artwork, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. (c) 1980 FANTASY TALES.

STEPHEN JONES, Editor.

DAVID A. SUTTON, Associate Editor.

Ever the Faith Endures

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN



"When a god's overthrown, it becomes a devil."

Manly Wade Wellman is one of our most important practitioners in the fantasy field, having blazed a trail from way back in the 1920s when he began to sell fiction to *Weird Tales*. In fact, he became one of the most important contributors during the life of that illustrious publication. Manly has written a number of stories around each of three characters: Judge Pursuivant, an occult investigator who appeared in *Weird Tales* in the 1930s (as written by Gans T. Field), and who was later followed by another psychic sleuth, John Thunstone, in the 1940s. Lastly there was his most famed character, John the Balladeer, a series of yarns he contributed to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in the '50s. These were collected in *Who Fears the Devil?* (Arkham House 1963, and subsequent paperback reprints). Wellman turned to historical and biographical writing in the 1950s as fantasy markets dwindled, but luckily for devotees, has returned to the field in recent years. Carcosa Press brought out the award-winning collection *Worse Things Waiting* in 1973, this mammoth volume reprinting stories from *Weird Tales*, *Unknown*, *Strange Stories* and elsewhere. This summer Carcosa plans to publish *Lonely Vigil*, being a complete collection of Manly's various occult investigator stories. The author has also been in for a share of prizes too: he was nominated for a Pulitzer for one of his historical works, and won first prize in an *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* short story contest. A non-fiction work, *Dead and Gone*, earned him the Mystery Writers of America Award and in 1975 the World Fantasy Award went to *Worse Things Waiting*. The story which follows (originally published in Gerald Page's *Year's Best Horror VI*) was written after Manly had travelled along the Roman Hadrian's Wall in the north of England. He has described the tale as somewhat a love-letter to England, which he has visited a number of times (his ancestors first emigrated to Virginia over 300 years ago). Without further comment, it is our privilege to publish the following story...

HE'D SOMEHOW expected it to be like this. What else had he been looking for?

Though he'd never been here, had only wanted to be here. Had saved money for this journey overseas, then had puzzled and striven over railway timetables and guidebooks to get here. Here to the home his ancestors had left to go to America.

The place was swaddled in trees, there a couple of miles from the village where he'd left the train that noon, all among a landscape of tawny hills and softly grassed valleys, gatherings of sheep grazed here and there in the open, under the serene authority of black and white dogs. And no trees out there, only here, heavily marshalled beyond the quickset hedge with its June blossoms. There were yews, rowans, Scotch firs, two or three enormous oaks, with shrubs matted here and there underneath. It was like a solid chunk of forest taken from somewhere else and set here among the meadows and slopes and

distant heights.

Wofford Belson stood opposite a driveway gap in the hedge. He was fifty-five, big but not soft, wearing the tweed suit he had bought in London. Gray stitched his heavy black hair. His face was square-jawed, vigorously seamed. He reminded himself that the Belsons had been American for three hundred years. Before that, British for how many thousands?

Movement among the trees, and a woman stepped into view. She was tall, slim, in dark blue slacks and a white blouse and a gray jacket. Her hair was a fine toss of syrupy brown. She wore broad spectacles. In one long hand she held a towel. She came toward him.

"Yes?" she said.

Belson wished he had a hat to take off.

"I wondered --" he began, stopped, and started again. "Does this house happen to be called Belstone?"

"Yes," she said again, clipping the syllable. "It happens to be called Belstone."

FANTASY TALES

"Let me explain." He wondered if he could. "My name's Wofford Belson, but it used to be Belstone." Once more he stopped.

"Used to be?" she prompted.

Behind the spectacles her watchful eyes were as blue as deep, clear water, and as calm. She was, he thought, perhaps forty-two or forty-three. And quite pretty.

"I'm American," he said unnecessarily. "The name got changed over there. Back in 1643, in Virginia." He smiled, white-toothed. "That's long ago in America, if it's not long ago here."

"And I daresay you're curious about your British origins, Mr. Belson," she said gently. "I am Anne Belstone, and we must be cousins, at a number of removes." She smiled, ever so slightly, and she had a dimple. "Forgive me if I seemed careful. I live here alone, you know, and I don't get many callers." Her blue eyes appraised him. "But come into the yard if you like."

"Thank you, ma'am," he said. "I ought to say, I'm from North Carolina, a town called Chapel Hill. That's where the State university is."

"You are of the university?" she asked as he walked into the driveway and toward her. "You teach?"

"No, ma'am, but I graduated from there, and I have a book store in town. Now that I'm alone in the world - divorced, my children grown up - I wanted to come here. I always wanted to. Hoped to make it during the war, but they sent me to the Pacific theater." He felt that he was jabbering nervously, and wondered why. "I do know something, not much, about my family before the name got changed."

"Do you know why the name is Belstone?" she asked. "Do come and sit on the porch, I was going to have tea there. Would you care for a cup?"

"I thank you, ma'am, that's right good of you."

"Not at all."

They walked along the pebbled driveway. Overhead, the trees crossed stirring green branches. The driveway curved in around a gaunt, jagged rock, mottled gray in colour

and almost as tall as Belson. He thought that Anne Belstone drew away from it as she walked, and would have looked at it closely, but there was the house.

He stopped in his tracks to look. It was what he had wanted, without knowing it.

The house was squarely and massively built, with lean windows in its two stories and dormers in the high slate roof. The stone of the walls was gray with a hint of rose. Up the two gable sides sprouted wide chimneys of the same rose-gray stone, built into the walls themselves and each crowned with a row of hatlike pots. Across the front sprawled a paved porch with sturdy posts of cut stones in dark mortar. Inside the windows behind the porch clung tawny curtains. Along the porch's edge stood flower pots with tufts of bloom.

"Is something wrong?" asked Anne Belstone at his shoulder.

"I was admiring the house."

"I suppose it's different from houses in the States."

"The chimneys," he tried to explain his feelings. "They're part of the house, of the walls. Not put on after the house was built, not tacked on as an afterthought."

She chuckled. It was a musical chuckle.

"Well, sir, generations of your forebears lived here. This house, or most of it, goes back to Elizabethan times. I think of it as utilitarian, old-fashioned. You make me wonder if it isn't more than that. But come up and sit on the porch."

They mounted the blocky steps. "Here," she said, and laid a hand on the back of a chair of weathered, solid wood. "Sit here and I'll fetch us out a tray."

Then she was gone. Belson sat in the chair. Next to it was a blocky table. He looked out into the trees of the yard.

Someone stood beside the driveway. No, it was the jagged rock. It was like an ill-proportioned human figure in the shadows. It seemed to have sloping shoulders and a knobby head. Eyes? But they were only scraps of shadow. The mouth-like crack was just a crack. Belson told

himself that. For a moment he almost got out of the chair to step from the porch and walk down to examine the rough pillar. Then he lectured himself to wait and ask Anne Belstone about it first.

Behind him he fancied he heard a rustle. He turned in his chair, expecting to see his hostess. There was only a window behind him, and a stir in the stealthy curtains.

Then she came through the door, bringing a broad tray set with heaped dishes. He rose, took the tray from her and set it on the table.

"I hope you don't mind tea," she said, sitting in another chair. "I believe that most Americans prefer coffee."

"Tea suits me fine, ma'am," he said. "Don't fret about Americans not appreciating it. Some of them dumped a whole shipload of it into Boston harbour one time."

She laughed her musical laugh and poured him a cup. He declined cream and sugar and thanked her when she put a roll and a pat of butter on a plate for him. They ate and drank.

"That's a right interesting chunk of rock in your yard," he felt it was time to remark. "For a moment, sitting here, I thought it looked like somebody coming in."

She set down her cup, her eyes moody behind the spectacles. "I'd better tell you about that. That stone is named Belstone, too."

"It is?" he said, smiling, for he had begun to like her company. "Who named it that?"

"Nobody knows. It's been here, probably, since prehistoric times. And the name means a god. Baal."

She sipped tea. Belson gazed at the stone, disliking the fancy that it gazed back at him.

"Baal," he repeated. "That's out of the Bible."

"Out of many places," said Anne Belstone. "Baal was worshipped by Old Testament people, by European pagans, worshipped here in the British Isles. His name's on the land. Balquiddir and Balgonie in Scotland, Baltimore in Ireland - they hark back to Baal, worshipped by the Celts before the Romans."

"And we have the name too,

Cousin Anne."

She smiled again when he called her that. "Yes, let's be cousinly. I'll call you Cousin - Wofford, you said?"

"That's my mother's family name. I've lots of Wofford kinfolk."

"Kinfolk," she said after him. "Not me. I was an only child, so was my father, and his father before him. Any cousins I have are almost as distant as you, Cousin Wofford. I don't keep in touch with them, and I have no friends you could call friends, not here. People don't come here."

"Not the milkman, the postman?"

"I get milk and letters and supplies yonder in the village. I've a little car out behind, to do my errands. I don't even try to keep up this house, so forgive me for not taking you inside. I live in just a bedroom and a kitchen."

He had a sense of movement at the window, but did not look. "We were talking about the Belstone," he reminded her.

"And I said the stone was always there where you see it. The Romans invaded and wanted to take it away, but some sort of disaster happened to anyone who tried, so they left it. When Saxon missionaries came along, they learned to let it alone, too."

"Was it that bad?" asked Belson, gazing at the rock.

"Bad enough that someone was told off, about a thousand years ago, to live here and guard it; and he took the name Belstone on account of his job."

"Baal's stone," said Belson, buttering a bit of roll. "Why Baal's stone? Was it an altar?"

Anne Belstone's shoulders drew up, in not quite a shudder. "You can say that. The old pagans had human sacrifices - that's why the Romans were so bitter about them. And where sacrifice has been, a spirit stays. It can't be exorcised."

"The missionaries tried, I reckon."

"Yes, and they failed. This must sound silly to you."

"It sounds fascinating, Cousin Anne."

She dimpled at the name. "Well, the stone's stayed where you see it,

FANTASY TALES

all those centuries. And the Belstones have lived here beside it, and sometimes got into trouble and then got out."

"One got to America," said Belson. "My ancestor Thomas."

"What do you know of him?"

"Almighty little," admitted Belson. "His name's in a book about persons of quality coming to America. He arrived at Jamestown in 1643, aboard a ship named *Bristol Venture*, and there's a note saying he had to take a special oath of allegiance to Charles the First. I've wondered about that."

"I can tell you," said Anne Belstone. "He was a younger son - the older son, Alan, was my ancestor. The records say that Thomas Belstone claimed magical powers. One day Matthew Hopkins arrived in this area. Do you know who he was?"

"A witch-hunter, wasn't he?"

"England's Witch-finder General. Thomas Belstone was one of twenty-three accused witches here, and the only one not hanged. He seems to have had money and friends to help him get more or less exiled instead."

"I'm glad he got to America," said Belson, smiling into her spectacled eyes. "He married a girl with Indian blood, and I'm glad for that, too. A drop of the Indian - that's really American."

She pondered that for a moment. Then:

"My ancestor Alan joined Cromwell - the winning side." Her soft voice had music in it. "He profited by that and he enlarged this house. We've lived here ever since, and I hope this much family history will content you, because I don't know much more."

"It's pleasant on this porch."

He changed the subject.

"Sometimes, when I sit out here at night, I hear a nightingale sing in the trees."

"Nightingale," he said after her. "We don't have those in America. I've often wondered how they sounded."

But she did not invite him to stay and find out. He set down his teacup.

"You said you won't show me the house, but I'd like to walk out and

look at that rock I'm named for."

"Well..." That was no permission, but no refusal, either.

He rose and walked into the yard. The gravelled way was bordered with shaggy moss, in which grew tiny red toadstools. He reached the rock. It stood as tall as himself. It was like the outline of a human shape, but if it had been hewn like that, the marks of hewing had long weathered away. Belstone studied the shadowed dints that looked like eyes, the crack that ran across like a mouth. That crack seemed to twist wryly.

"You're not pretty," he addressed it. "No wonder the old Romans wanted to put you away. What if I shoved you over?"

He lifted a hand, but he did not touch the rock. At that moment, it seemed to blur, as in a mist. He had a sensation of cold. And he heard the murmur of a voice.

That made him jump backward and turn around.

Anne Belstone had come silently out with him. Her hands clasped themselves in front of her. She whispered something. A prayer? But he did not know the words:

"*Sobrosto, ekkshilhai - pion fhanfhanisham -*"

She sidled away.

"What did you say?" he asked her.

"Old words I was taught when I was a girl."

"Some kind of spell?"

She did not answer that. "Come," she said, and turned to lead him back to the porch. He sat down and lifted his teacup, and silently cursed his hand for trembling.

"You had your wish, saw it at close quarters," she said. "Why did you make fun of it?"

He looked out at the silent rock. "You said human sacrifices."

"Only in those days before the Romans. Later on, blood sacrifices of animals." Her smooth cheek looked tense. "When a god's overthrown, it becomes a devil."

"And a devil must be bought off, he tried to fall in with her unhappy humour."

"Yes, he must be bought off."

"Let's talk about something else Cousin Anne. Thanks, I'd like more

tea."

She asked about his children. He talked proudly of his lawyer son who had two sons himself, and of his daughter who was finishing her studies for a doctorate in psychology. He told about his book store and how happily he kept it. He said he approved of old shoes and the novels of P. G. Wodehouse, and of vacations in the mountains and at the seaside.

She talked more briefly about herself. She had always lived at Belstone, except when she had gone to school as a girl. When her parents died, she had stayed there, quietly alone.

"Haven't men come visiting?" he teased her, smiling. "I'd think that any man who was a man would want to."

"I know very few men."

"You ought to come and visit in North Carolina."

"You make it sound perfect there," she said.

"Nothing's perfect, but most time things are good. Beautiful spring and summer and fall, and mild winters. And I have friends, some of them professors, scholars. You'd like them." He looked at her earnestly. "They'd like you, too."

At last her own smile came back. "Why do you think that?"

"They'd have to, because I like you so much myself."

"I wish I could come." She sounded as if she meant it. She rose and began to gather up the tea things.

"I hate to bring this to an end, Cousin Wofford."

"Why bring it to an end?" he protested.

Her eyes were blue, blue, behind the spectacles. "You have quite a walk to the village. You'll want to be there by sundown."

"It won't be sundown for quite a while. Look, come with me. We can have dinner at the inn."

She stacked dishes on the tray. "I mustn't, really. But it's been good having you here. You're - well, so healthy, so cheerful."

"You don't look unhealthy, and you could be cheerful if you half tried," he said. "I want to help you to try."

"I might be cheerful if -"

She left it unfinished. He studied the sweet curve of her cheek as she bent over the tray.

"Look here, why didn't you ever marry?" he demanded suddenly, strong in the sense it was none of his business. "You ought to have a family, children."

"No," she said gently, "not for me. If you'll excuse me, I'll take these back to the kitchen."

She carried the tray to the door and turned the knob with her free hand. She stepped inside and closed the door behind her. He heard the click of the catch. Had she locked it from inside? Why?

Rising, he walked to the door and turned the big brass knob. It wasn't locked. He pushed it inward and stepped into the house.

Dim in there, a sort of sandy-brown light. That was from the curtains at the window. He took half a dozen steps along a hall and looked through an open arch into a broad, dim room.

It was walled with darkly aged wooden panels and set with upright timbers, like the ribs of a ship's hold. Furniture stood here and there, draped with dusty sheets. At the far end, a fireplace, and, though it was warm June outside, a nest of coals burned redly on the hearth. Belson felt its heat.

On the hob of the fireplace was built up a little cube of stones. Upon it, as upon an altar, lay what looked like shreds of raw meat.

Belson gazed at the hearth, wondering. Something moved on the far side of the room, beside a draped chair, something black and bulky. Belson turned his gaze upon it.

Only a particularly deep shadow, shifting perhaps in the light of the coals. Or a robe or coat of heavy dark fur, thrown there. Or -

But it stirred again. It rose slowly erect, like a black bear, gross and shaggy. But not a bear either, not with that broad flat face, those glowing pale eyes. Where the nose should be was a damp blob, like soggy brown leather, with staring nostrils. The mouth was a broad cleft. Upper and lower teeth jutted, like splinters of china.

FANTASY TALES

Frozen, unbelieving, Belson looked. The glowing eyes looked back at him. Long, knobby arms lifted, spreading hands like hairy rakes. Talons glinted, as sharp and pale as the teeth. The mouth gaped, made a crooning snarl. It stepped toward him, on long flippers of feet.

"No, you don't!" Belson found his voice. "Stay away from me!"

He turned to run, and bumped into Anne Belstone. She pushed him into the hall. She raised her arms high.

"Athe, pemeath." She was saying more strange words. "Somiatoai, halika."

It stood fast, its eyes flashed pale.

"Ah jathos noio sattis," Belson heard her chant. "Ishoroh."

He ran into the hall, leaving her alone there. He scrabbled the door open and was out on the porch, gasping for breath.

"Selu, samhaiah," said her voice in the house behind him. "Trinu, tamensaha."

He clung dizzily to the back of a chair. His knees wavered. Something made a noise behind him and he looked back in terror. Anne Belstone was on the porch, closing the door. She walked toward him. Her sweet face was as a pan of fresh milk.

"Now," she said gently. "Now you know why I didn't want to invite you into the house."

"That in there," he mouthed. "A man or an animal or what?"

"Not a man or animal." She was precise, informative. "I told you that the Belstones were ordered to look after him."

"A god, is that thing a god?"

"He used to be. Now he's what he is. Always hungry."

Belson grunted. "You said words to drive him back."

"I told you, my parents made me learn them." She shrugged. "I keep him here, so that he won't plague others - plague the world."

Something scraped inside the heavy door. She turned that way. "Heriel aias stock nahas," she pronounced. The scraping ceased.

"He's not wholly satisfied with pieces of butcher's meat or just

rabbits or chickens," she said wearily. "Maybe he thought you were the sort of sacrifice he used to expect."

He blinked at her. "You worship him," he half accused.

"Yes," she agreed. "Yes I do. That way, I can keep him here. And now, you must go."

"Go?" He looked out at the jagged stone pillar.

"Probably he knows you're of the Belstone blood. That makes it bad for you, very bad. You must never come near this house again."

The drapes stirred at a window.

"How can you possibly live here?" cried Belson, wondering how steady her stance was, her voice was. "How can you?"

"Because I've always lived here," she replied, "I was brought up to live here, stay here, see that he stays here, too. It's what I'm on earth for."

"No!" he fairly shouted into her calm, pale face. He seized both her slim hands in his big ones. "Come with me."

"Come with you?" she said after him and stared.

"Come home to America with me, Anne. Don't even step back inside there for anything. We'll buy you clothes, whatever you need, in London. We'll go back together, back home. It'll be your home, too. He pressed her hands. "Come with me," he begged. "Please!"

"I can't. If you'll only stop to think, you'll know why I can't. It's for me to live here at Belston and keep him here, too. Keep him here away from everyone else."

"But when you don't live to keep him any more?" he prodded at her. "When you die at last?"

"Who knows what will happen then? Her voice rose, her hands gripped his. "Who can know that? I'll be dead. I'll be past knowing. But until I'm dead, I'll stay and keep him here."

Strongly she dragged her hands free of his grip.

"Now, this is my house," she said, "though just now it may not seem quite like that to you. This is my house, and I must tell you to leave."

"I won't leave," he tried to

argue.

"Go this instant," she commanded. "If you don't, I'll open the door and let him out here."

Again, a stir at the drapes of the window.

"And you know that I mean what I say," she told him. "Go on, go away, and don't ever come back."

She pushed him towards the steps, with a power he had not expected in her slim body. He blundered down them to the gravel below.

"Go away!" she cried at him once more.

He walked along the driveway.

As he came opposite the rock he heard a sound from it, like a sigh of wind. Its eye-patches shone suddenly, as bits of ice shine. The crack of a mouth seemed to twitch.

He quickened his steps. Out on the road, he turned toward the village. He dared not look back. He could not have seen her, anyway. Upon him rushed a grinding sense of loss, of defeat.

His breath shook in his throat. He felt a trickle of wet on his cheeks. He was in tears, for the first time since he had been a little, little boy.



The Wind-Walker

By BRIAN LUMLEY

(In dreams I converse with Him, and ask:)

"Weird wanderer of interstellar ways,
Ice-god of frigid-flamed auroral skies,
Nightmare Lord whose glaring gorgon gaze
Dooms all who see into your carmine eyes;
Whence came you here, why, how long ago,
Anthropomorphic god of Esquimaux?"

(And He answers:)

"Long aeons gone, before Man's watery birth,
Kthulhu the Master brought us down to Earth;
Even the cinder-stars burst into flame,
Rejoicing when at last we Old Ones came!"

FANTASY TALES

Joe Schifino has appeared in these pages before, in issue number 4, where readers were introduced to his fantasy character, Lupus Lupolius. We are presenting here another tale featuring Lupus, and meanwhile Joe continues to bulk-out his writings in the series. A Lupolius vampire story, *Children of the Night* has been accepted by Paul Allen for *Fantasy Newsletter*, while *Vengeance of the Wolf* still lurks in the *Fantasy Tales* file for future publication. He has completed a novel, *Transgression*, and is working on a sequel, *Renegades*, both utilising the character. Other than these, he has sold two novellas to *Fantasy Newsletter* and is currently at work on an adult fantasy novel set in the Paleolithic period, between the third and last ice ages. Now to reintroduce our readers to Lupus here's...



"Her long dark hair hinted at great beauty."

Lair of the White Wolf

By J. R. SCHIFINO

Illustration by DAVID LLOYD

ANCIENT but well-kept was the King's Highway, the mist-shrouded road that traced the Morovian coast, linking the Western Kingdoms to the Northeast. The smell of the sea was in the air and, although they could not be

seen from the cobbling, distant breakers crashed. Nearby, trees of the great rain forest swayed as the wind moaned eerily through their boughs.

The fog, rolling in the breeze, half-lifted to unveil a lone horse-

man. Eastward bound, the hauberked rider had long since left the regions of culture and commerce. Civilization lay behind him and ahead was naught but tumbledown hamlets and an occasional log-walled skalli. Scatterings of peasants or country squires, they were all that remained of a once populous countryside after the Eastling ravages. It was toward such a desolate village that man and steed, hooves clopping loudly on the cobblestones, headed.

The warrior remembered this kraal. Years ago he had drifted through, and he recalled how for a pittance he had purchased lodgings, oats and a farmer's daughter for the night. His stay had not been notable, and only because he despised camping on cold, wet ground did he now bother with the place. Nevertheless, in the dark who cared how drab was the wench so long as her furs were dry? He hefted his full coinpouch and sneered.

Topping a bank, the drifter found his thoughts snapped rudely back to reality. He could hear the harsh rumble of a mob and, looming ominously out of the mist, a palisade rose. He stroked the luxuriant mane to caution his steed to silence. Then, riding down the slope, he circumvented the rough-hewn rampart.

Entering an unguarded gate, the stranger stared about, apprehensive at the ease of his entry. The Occupation had left an indelible mark upon the land, and rare indeed was there a slackening of its siege-mentality; to ride through a soldierless gate was as strange as embarking on a galley with neither sails nor oars.

He did not like it.

A sudden wind dissipated the fog. Peering suspiciously from side to side, the warrior saw to his weapons. He felt the wolf-pommel hilt of his scimitar rest familiarly in his palm. Half-baring its blue-steel blade, he smiled faintly. A mercenary from war-torn Westmark, he felt little threat from poorly-armed bumpkins and an occasional tradesman. He had been born and bred to the Warman Caste, and as such wine

and a bedwench were his birthright till he continued his journey to the far Northeast.

Reaching the village square, he discovered why the kraal had seemed so deserted. A mob was rapidly growing around something or someone who had incurred its wrath. Hackles rising, the warrior saw that which ignited a blaze in his smouldering brown eyes...

"She poisoned my well!" screamed a fat, jowly lout as he flung a clot of earth at the half-naked female being dragged toward a set of stocks.

Another villager joined the din, ranting, "She made my milk-cow go sour!"

"Witch - *witch!*"

"Our hens won't lay!" howled an old farmwife, features contorting to a mask of fury and hate.

Stones flew and one struck above the victim's breast. Reeling from the impact, she jerked off balance a burly brute who gripped her wrist. From his garb her captor was evidently a sheriff and, angered at being wrenching about, he raised his free hand and smote her over the left eye. His crested ring left a deep gash and blood streamed down her face. Recoiling, the dark-haired wench spat at her tormentor, crying, "You're all mad - mad! I'm no witch..."

"Liar!"

"Whore!" howled the crone of the hens.

"Burn her!"

As the swarthy stranger looked on, he experienced sensations utterly new to him. He gazed at her face and from his belly flowed a warmth that grew to fill his chest. There was a desire - a need - to hug the hurt wench and shield her from further harm. She was choice womanflesh, far too fine to suffer the wrath of the mob. Albeit fully aware of her as a woman, the warman's attraction was far, far more than lust. More stones flew and the seething in his breast burst into a black fury. Scabbarding his Damascus scimitar, he spurred his horse and the great black charger shot like a bolt, crashing through the press.

FANTASY TALES

Screams of fear and pain filled the air as the mighty steed sent villagers sprawling. Blood and broken bones in his wake, the mercenary galloped through the mob. As peasants fled in terror, he pierced the ring encircling the wench. Sweeping her up in his arms, the horseman rode clear of the milling, shrieking mob.

Once in the open, the warrior raced along lanes and twisting alleys until, reaching the gate, he fled the village. And only the dust from his horse's hooves and the wails of the wounded marked his passing...

SUPPORTING the lass with his shieldarm, the rider held his reins loosely. He made no attempt to bind her and for that the wench was grateful and compliant. She rested her head on his mailed shoulder, clinging to him like a child frightened of the night.

Switching the reins to his shieldhand, the stranger gently stroked her tear-streaked face. Blood still flowed from the wound above her eye and he paused in their flight to tend it. Her hurt was a deep ugly gash, requiring much salve and a thick wad of bandage. As he applied dressing and cloth, he feared that her beauty might permanently be marred.

She smiled. It was the hesitant wistful smile of one long-used to pain and loneliness. Timidly she kissed his cheek, and her eyes promised much in the nights to come.

"Who are you, m'lord?"

Chest swelling with pride, he answered, "Lupus Lupolius."

Called the Wolf of Provonia, Lupolius was known and feared throughout the embattled Western Kingdoms. Famed for his exploits on the Mark against Mongol, Tatar and Hun, it came as a shock when she shook her head and shrugged.

"How is it yo' live in such a vacuum, wench?" he demanded, stung pride hardening his tone.

"I live in a simple forest hut, m'lord," she explained, adding, "and my name is Leila."

A professional slayer since

late adolescence, Lupolius was unmoved by the gentle side of life. He found, however, that this dark-eyed female struck a chord in his breast which had not sounded in a decade. Refusing to acknowledge his tenderness as other than simple priming for seduction, he was determined to pay the matter no heed.

He devoted his attention to systematically assessing her worth. Guessing Leila to be in her mid-twenties, Lupolius mused how he had not bedded a woman in months. He had grown bored with the nymphet slave-girls so common in Morovia and found the prospect of a seasoned bedwench stimulating. Even matted and tangled, her long dark hair hinted at great beauty once washed and brushed. Her eyes, nearly black, flashed with intelligence now that shock had ceased to daze her. Her skin was soft, a surprise considering her peasant garb. That she was neither fair-skinned nor Eastling betrayed her noble blood, for the aristocracy of this war-torn land was a dusky hybrid race.

Flushing beneath his burning stare, the bare-breasted wench modestly tried to knot her garb. After several failures, she gave up and Lupolius, enjoying her nudity, cheered the triumph of the clothes.

He cradled her as they followed the cobblestoned road for many miles. Watching the darkening sky, the Provonian decided that they should seek a campsite before Sol had completed his heavenly trek. The air grew cool and Leila started to shiver. Lupolius drew his black bearskin cloak about her and hoped that she liked the feel of fur on flesh, for he intended to surfeit her with it ere night was done.

His companion, however, did not look upon the setting sun with expectation. Her body stiffened as tremors of fear ran through her, each fiercer than the last, until she was left limp. Although noticing this, Lupolius shrugged it off. To him it was the natural reaction of a simple country girl to a dashing warrior of the world.

Leila continued to stare at the

waning sun. Her breath came more rapidly and her pulse quickened. Mistaking this for excitation, Lupolius was taken aback when suddenly she flung herself from his saddle and fled, scampering doe-like into the woods.

"Damnation, Ebon!" he cursed, angered at how easily his prize had evaded him. "Some thanks this is! Yo'd think I was gonna sell 'er to the Mongols!"

The great black stallion only snorted, but one might almost have imagined cynicism in its reply. As Lupolius' constant companion, the charger had seen wenches a-plenty find themselves branded and collared on an auction block, for the Wolf of Provincia was not one to refrain from slaving whenever his coinpouch ran low.

Dismounting, he hung his ornate buckler from the saddlehorn then led his horse into the woods where he hitched the reins to a low-hanging limb.

"I'll be damned 'fore I let that little bitch get away. 'Cept this time, Ebon, we bind her 'cross yo'r saddle..."

SCYTHES and halbards brandished, the villagers streamed from the kraal. Vengeance-bound, they stormed after the stranger who had seized their prey. The sheriff, backsword in hand, swaggered in the lead, boasting of what he would do once the drifter was brought to bay. Thrusting out his chest, the strutting official tried his utmost to conceal the roll of fat that spilled over his sash. Behind him the natives howled in rage, cursing the horseman who had left a half-score maimed. Withal, in many hearts lurked a dark dread of the stranger, as if the wench had somehow conjured him for her salvation. She was an accused witch, and the Gods alone knew what was the grim-faced fiend who had so suddenly galloped through them...

"Amos," called a well-dressed villager to the constable.

Turning to see who had dared use his familiar name, the sheriff relaxed upon seeing that it was Conrad, the mayor.



"Yeah?"

"Are you going to try to take them alive?"

The constable laughed. A loud cruel chortle, it left little doubt as to his intention.

"Hell no! She's a witch an' Luna knows what in Hell he is! Can't see no point in takin' chances..."

A sigh of relief went up from one of the posse. Others too supported this plan; having suffered the warrior's wrath, none were eager to face him again, save in overwhelming numbers. With bows and spears they would slay him from afar and then deal with the coffee-coloured wench...

Although the motley press hiked all afternoon, they knew there was no chance of catching the rider if he kept to the road. The mayor, however, speculating that the wench was a succubus, felt she would not long restrain herself from feasting on the stranger.

"She's a whore an' a witch!" agreed the constable. "An' if that Lobo's like the rest of Ranar's damned mercenaries, she'll stop to have her way with him."

FANTASY TALES

"Aye," snorted the mayor indignantly. "And that will be when we get them!"

"Conrad, what's the bes' way to deal with the rider...uh, jus' in case he's a...well, you know."

"He's no vampyre, not being so bold in the day and all, and a were-creature he isn't. So, he might well be a demon that the witch conjured up..."

Fear filled the faces of those who overheard him.

"But I think silver and this Holy Water from the Tidebringer's shrine should do the trick."

Nodding, the sheriff quickened his pace and urged his followers on. If they did not come upon the warrior and the wench soon, they would have to return to the kraal, for no one wanted to be caught at night on the forest-lined road with such Hellspawn.

They were about to head home when, rounding a bend, Conrad and the sheriff heard the black stallion. Aware of the villager's eyes upon them, Amos and the mayor reluctantly entered the woods.

"Look!" shouted Conrad, spear-head gleaming in the waning sunlight. "It is the killer's horse - she must have drained him already!"

Swiftly searching the surrounding area, the huntsmen among them found the spoor of the mailed warrior. A trail of brushed branches and trodden grass led into the woods, and immediately Conrad deduced what had occurred.

"She's led him to his doom. Come, take the horse and return to the village - there's nothing more we can do..."

SON OF Marcus Lupolius, commander of the Provonian Army, the warman was no novice to woods nor trailing. He had grown up hunting bear and great boar on his father's vast estates, and he glided like a wraith through the brush. Nevertheless, the wench was fleet of foot and, further, was unhampered by armour and arms. Lupolius quickly realized that he must pace himself and gradually run her down, for he could never catch his nim-

le prey by sprinting.

Angered by Leila's ingratitudo, the Provonian swore to bind and rape her as soon as she was again in his power.

Slipping through the verdure, he brushed away gnats and flies as he cursed the damp coastal forest. In no time he was sweating profusely beneath his mail and thick leather aketon. A fresh curse on lips, Lupolius found that in the spreading dusk even his nocturnal vision could not follow the spoor of the barefoot wench.

At last dusk transformed into darkness so deep that it rendered her trail invisible. Reluctantly Lupolius turned and, by instinct, retraced his path to the road. He found the trek long and perilous, with roots and creepers constantly underfoot. Luckily it was early autumn and the carnivores were yet in the mountains where game was plentiful. Skilled huntsman though he was, the Provonian did not care to meet some flesh-eater in blackness as Stygian as this. He clutched his wolfpommel scimitar and took grim satisfaction in its feel against his palm. Man, beast or mutant, the foe mattered not so long as he bore his blue-steel blade.

Pressing on, the warman eventually reached the cobblestoned road. He strained his ears for some sound from Ebon, whom he knew should not be far. Try as he might, however, Lupolius could not locate his beloved black charger.

Glancing up, he saw a full moon breaking from behind a cloudbank, and soon the King's Highway was illuminated by its silvery light. Lupolius, carefully scanning his surroundings, saw the brushed branches which marked Leila's headlong flight. As he stared intently at the cobbling's edge a curse dripped like venom from his lips.

"Balls of the All-Father! They've stolen my horse!"

Enraged beyond measure, the Wolf of Provonia stormed up the road, visions of a fierce and terrible vengeance bubbling through his brain...

DAWN broke softly over the deep blue sea. And with it came an awakening of the forest; birds chirped loudly and insects sought pollen or other bugs. Such sounds, perforce, died with the appearance of greater, more destructive predators. A band of hunters were stalking game and, although none would admit it, the lifeless husk of the olive-skinned horseman.

Fearfully they scanned their surroundings, for too long had these woods been haunted by the succubus. They also feared a surprise encounter with some great carnivore grown too old to catch the fleet forest creatures. Inevitably such predators turned to simpler prey - the villagers. Man-eaters were common in the life of the kraal, and many were its families that had been left grieving.

Gliding ghostlike along verdant paths, the hunters abruptly came upon a coffee-coloured form sprawled athwart a fallen trunk. Although thick dark hair hid her face, the supple figure was unmistakably that of the witch-woman. The villagers hesitatingly approached the motionless wench, their hatred vying with fear of her power. Eventually one marshalled nerve enough to grab the prone female and bind her with rawhide.

Leila awoke with a gasp. At first she thought that it was Lupolius come to claim her, but when she beheld her captors, her heart began to beat wildly. Glancing from face to dour face, the naked wench was filled with dread.

"Should we have a little fun first?" suggested one, a leer mal-forming his face.

"No!" warned another. "Mount a witch and it could damn your soul!"

The rest agreed with the voice of prudence and made it clear they would not touch her. Nonetheless, the hunter wanting to ravish Leila was not to be denied some satisfaction. Slapping the witch-woman hard across her face, he sent her tumbling over the trunk. As she lay on her back, quaking and expecting the worst, the brute commenced to kick her. Gritting her teeth, Leila rolled from side to side, striving to escape his savage

assault. In her writhing she found herself pinned by the trunk where each impact of his moccasin rammed her against its jagged bark.

"Damned slut! Luna alone knows what plagues you carry! But don't worry, we'll deal with you good an' proper back in town!"

Wrenching Leila up by her hair, the hunter sent her stumbling down the trail. They feared the wench and, despite their bravado, cuffed her whenever her eyes left the trail lest she give them the Evil Eye. Mile after merciless mile the villagers drove Leila; lashing her with belts and cursing profanely, they herded her to the kraal...

Reaching the settlement at last, the hunters had no sooner entered its gate than a mob gathered. Eager to hound and vilify her, the throng closed in to spit or hurl offal at the grime-streaked prisoner.

Leila trembled in apprehension, for once more she was in the power of the kraalfolk who persecuted her. Glancing about, hands bound behind her, the naked wench could not even defend herself. Her captors, eager for recognition, held them back till the witch-woman could be brought before the sheriff. Once at the stone jail the boldest of the band hammered on the oak door with his hatchet butt.

"Come out an' see what we brung you, Amos!" he yelled, triumph lending him a new-found arrogance.

After several minutes the portal opened and out strutted the sheriff. He was followed by Conrad, sheepishly adjusting his tunic while a blond slave-boy peered from a bed of furs.

"All right, all ri..." Amos went slack-jawed upon seeing who the hunters had. "Well, well, well - this time, bitch, we finish what we started. Prepare the stake and bring firewood - we'll burn her curse from our village!"

The peasants scampered to their huts, each fetching faggots or kindling from their hearths. So eager were they to burn the witch-woman that within minutes a pyre had been made ready.

Leila looked on in horror. She strove with all her strength to break the bonds, but the rawhide only sli-

FANTASY TALES

ced her skin and drew trickles of blood. Tears, pent-up as long as possible, streamed from her black eyes. Turning to Conrad and the sheriff, she fell to her knees.

"Please...please! I'm not a witch! I swear by Luna and the All-Mother - I swear unghh..!"

"Slut!" screamed Amos, striking her viciously. "How dare you profane the Tidebringer's name! You're a witch - a succubus! And this day you'll pay for your crimes!"

Shaking her head and sobbing uncontrollably, Leila was beyond speech, uttering only primal noises.

Conrad ordered the hunters to drag her to the stake centred in the village square. There they chained the wench to the thick post and proceeded to heap wood around her. As she writhed and squirmed against the post, the rolling of her breasts and loins drove many a villager to craving. Her skin glistened with sweat as adrenalin flooded her body. She tossed her head from side to side, hair swishing in the breeze. Tears stinging her eyes, Leila looked up to see the sheriff reach for a torch, and she shrieked in animal terror. Legs twitching spasmodically, urine streamed down her thighs...

So engrossed were the villagers by the spectacle that no-one noticed the hauberked figure who dropped from the empty wall. Moving with the feral silence of a wolf, the latecomer absorbed the bizarre scene in a single glance. And when he beheld Leila a flood of conflicting emotions swept over him, churning to chaos the fathomless abyss that was his mind. Rage and resentment strove against his strange tender sentiments, until at last a clear thought erupted from the maelstrom. Once more he stared at Leila, and his smouldering brown eyes burst into flame. His thin cruel lips curled back in a snarl and a low growl hissed from him. He drew a scimitar and then a poniard. Blade in each hand, the warrior felt a black rage sweep over him. This was the woman he had cradled in his arms, the woman he gladly would have known, the woman he now yearned to bring home.

Lupus Lupolius went mad.

Striding to the rear of the mob, the Wolf of Provonia slashed randomly, hewing all within reach. Women screamed and urchins fled in terror as villager after villager fell before his sweeping steel. Striking with the frenzy of a feeding shark, Lupolius carved a scarlet swath through the crowd. Howling, bleeding kraalfolk lay strewn in windrows, flesh sheared by his keen blades. His steel swept the throng like scythes through wheat. Children and the aged, guards and slaves, all suffered the wrath of the blood-crazed mercenary.

He cut his way, step by gory step, to the stake where hung Leila, eyes glossed from fear. With one sure blow he cleaved her chains and, sheathing his poniard, drew her to him.

Seeing the warrior distracted, Conrad snatched a halbard and thrust at Lupolius' back. Its bill struck off-angle and glanced harmlessly from his mail coat. Wheeling, the warman struck lightning-like, blue blade crimsoned as it parted head from neck. Decapitated, the mayor crumpled across the pyre.

The sheriff, backsword extended, retreated in fear from the grim Spectre of Death. Relentlessly Lupolius stalked him, eyes flaming. Twice their blades rang out as Amos desperately defended himself; but then, with uncanny speed, the scimitar pierced his guard. Entrails dangling, the ashen-faced sheriff stumbled off, shrieking in shock and pain. More villagers tried to stay the madman who stormed among them like a puma among sheep. One after another they fell beneath his fury. Limbs littered the square as the razored scimitar wreaked its havoc until, at long last, nothing in the village lived save Leila and Lupolius.

Leading the blood-spattered wench to the communal corral, the Provonian draped his cloak over her soiled shoulders. Gently he kissed her before leaving to retrieve Ebon. Once the great stallion was saddled, Lupolius led him to the fence which they angrily smashed. Mounting his steed, he reached down and lifted the yet-

stunned Leila to his saddle.

Gazing deep into his eyes, the woman felt that she was truly safe at last. Ebon snorted and broke into a trot as Lupolius cradled the weeping wench to his breast...

ON A FUR-HEAPED pallet of straw Lupolius tenderly bathed the blood and filth from Leila's flesh. Dipping his sponge into a bucket of well water, he was especially careful when cleaning above her left eye, for a thick scab remained where the sheriff's ring had scarred her. Leila smiled. She reached up to lingeringly trace her fingers along his face. Putting aside the sponge, Lupolius took her in his arms and drew her close. Lips touching, she savagely thrust her tongue into his mouth, kissing him with a passion he had never known before.

Slayer and lover of great repute, Lupolius responded at once. He did not take her in his accustomed manner, but remained sensitive to her wound and recent trauma. Leila, however, showed scant inclination toward restraint. She wrenched the doeskin breeches from his hips and guided him to her womanhood. Then, as the sun beamed through the open cottage window, Lopus Lupolius and the fiery country wench made love...

Sol passed his zenith and had nearly set before the warrior and his woman were done. Time and again they had roused one another, yet neither was sated. They had touched and talked and they made more love to the gentle breeze and the soft sounds of the forest. And only as the hut's cozy interior darkened with coming night did Lupolius roll over onto his back.

Hugging Leila, he buried his face in the hair he had so painstakingly brushed. Soon the Provonian felt his lids grow heavy. But ere he dozed off, the young warman turned and pressed lips to her ear. Within him was a strange warm glow that he had never before experienced. And as he tickled her lobe with his tongue, Lupolius haltingly whispered, "I... I love yo'."

Her eyes glowed as she squeezed him and, entwined in one another's arms, they slipped into a deep peaceful sleep...

Epilogue

IT WAS in the dim pre-dawn hours that the Wolf of Provincia finally awoke. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he glanced about as the full moon's light streamed eerily through a broken ceiling. Naked beams, planking long since rotted away, were silhouetted against the star-filled sky. Lupolius shook his head. Clearing away his drowsiness, he reached for his scimitar and his woman. But to his great surprise the woman he loved was nowhere to be found. Swiftly he stood and stared around. He was filthy, and his garb and armour lay strewn across a dusty floor. Rotten draperies flapped in a sudden breeze and through the broken, creaking shutters filtered more light.

Lupolius gaped in disbelief. The cosy cottage with its flowers and pots and hearth were gone, gone as if it had never existed. In its stead was a ramshackle ruin, covered by dust and mold, where weeds grew in abundance from cracked walls. The soft pallet of fur-heaped straw whereupon he had pleased his woman was now a rank rotting thing that made the aristocrat's skin crawl. The thought that he had lain naked on such a bed made him wince. There was a foulness in his mouth that he could not account for, and from what he recalled having eaten, any after-taste should have been most pleasant. Lupolius bent to gather his gear. Garbing swiftly, he donned helm and mail then stepped outside.

In the bright moonlight the cottage was revealed for what it was - a tumbledown wreck covered with dirt and rot. It was truly an abode of the Dead.

Lupolius shuddered.

He hastened across the field where he had hobbled Ebon to graze. Saddling his mount, Lupolius led him back to the ruin.

"Leila!" he yelled, voice trailing in the wind. He shouted again. There was no answer. In the moonlight he could see the thick dust carpeting the floor, and the only footprints to leave the cottage were his.

"Leila," he called, much loud-

er this time. "Leilaaa!"

In the distance an owl hooted. When its cry had faded, stark silence reclaimed the glade. The cabin was a wreck, a timeworn ruin that could not be where he had fallen asleep.

"Leila!"

Ebon snorted. Reluctantly the warman turned and mounted up. Guiding his massive steed to the meadow's

edge, he paused once more to call. But ere his woman's name had passed his lips, he saw something which made him gasp in shock. There, brightly revealed by the gleaming moon, was a great white wolf. Head jutting from the thick brush, its slightest feature could be seen - and above its left eye was a livid red scar...



The Blades of Hell

By DON HERRON

WITH thrust and cut and blood spurting redder than lust,
Ramparts they have whelmed, fortresses razed to dust,
Crook'd swords detonating in the press of fighting,
Purple eyes blazing red when fresh victims sighting,
Lucifer and horde swarm, a tempest darkly tossed,
Across dead Hell to torture souls forever lost.
Sinners they have carved, priest and prophet and whore,
But nary man as bold as he who loudly swore:
"By my sword, upon my oath, you black devils won't seize
Our piece of Hell and find us shaking on our knees!
Have at us and we'll cut your scaly, scrannel throats,
Make necklaces of your tusks and flay your hides for coats!"
He laughed in his black beard and shook his sword on high;
Ferocious Turlogh, once again ready to die.
By him on the smouldering rockpile hard men stood,
Pirates, rapists, killers without a thought for good.
On necks hanging scars, on broad backs brands, this rogue band
Spat, howled, and cursed from the crude fortress that they manned.
An evil smile tore Satan's mask, then daemons sprang
On His Command at the rebels with blade and fang.
For a grim eternity Turlogh swore and smote
Amidst the pack of ghouls which raked at his throat.
Hell rang to the clashing of swords, the shouts of men,
As the horde bore them down, red death for age-old sin.
Then the tempest blew blackly on, across Hell's floor,
Until aeons later it met a man, who swore:
"By my sword, upon my oath, you dark devils won't seize
Black Turlogh's hunk of Hell until you see it freeze!"

H. Warner Munn is one of the grand old masters of fantasy and the supernatural - these past few years seeing a renaissance of interest in his work. Munn was a contributor to *Weird Tales* from the mid-1920s and it was through correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft that he was inspired to write *The Werewolf of Ponkert* (1925). Several sequels were published during the following years. In 1979 Donald Grant issued volume 1 of *Tales of the Werewolf Clan* (with a further volume due later this year), bringing together the individual tales in the series. A novelette, set after the death of King Arthur, *King of the World's Edge* was published in 1939 and Harold Munn wrote its sequel, *The Ship from Atlantis* many years later (both being published as *Merlin's Godeon* by Ballantine Books in 1976). *Merlin's Ring* (1974 - also from Ballantine) and *The Sword of Merlin* (still writing) complete the trilogy. An historical novel, *The Lost Legion*, came out in February this year from Doubleday. As for shorter length writings, he has recently been published in W. Paul Ganley's *Weirdbook - The Merlin Stone* and *Stairway in the Sea*, with *Wanderers of the Waters* to follow. As a poet, Munn completed an epic poem about Joan of Arc, *The Banner of Joan* (Grant, 1975) and more recently a collection of his verse was published by Frederick J. Mayer of Outre Press, *The Book of Munn* (1979). In *Fantasy Tales* we have been pleased to feature verse by Harold Munn, but the following will be the first of his fiction in the magazine. The story was originally published in *Unknown Worlds* in 1939 and since then only once in a privately-printed booklet (1978). It is with great pleasure that, once more reaching a wider audience, we present...

Dreams May Come

By H. WARNER MUNN

Illustration by ANDREW SMITH

PARTIALLY shielded by the bridge abutment, the woman stared into the windy night. Sleet hid the farther shore and, except for the melancholy and distant lowing of a tug and the occasional grinding of wheels on the El far overhead, she could have fancied herself alone upon a barren seacoast.

But that, she knew, was only a fancy.

Beyond the scud lay the city, with lights, music and warmth to cheer the myriads of people it contained. Some were fortunate, most were contented, but every night a few sought lonely places, troubling no one, to do that which she soon must do.

However, a few moments could be spared to collect one's thoughts. She leaned back in the corner and closed her eyes. It was good that the wind had lost some of its sharp-

ness.

If she could only have foreseen, she thought, that the dreams of her childhood were to have proved so brutally true! Could she have taken warning by them and avoided the actions which had inevitably brought her to this river bank on such a night?

Or had she merely possessed a gift of "seeing" denied to most people, but found it impossible to profit by her premonitions which, not heeded until now, had been almost forgotten?

There had been, she remembered, the young student of philosophy whose studies had made him sombre and despairing. They had discussed the matter at length. She could see him now, as he twisted his glass and eyed the dregs of the stale beer.

"You know, Madge," he said,



SMITH

"But could the past be changed?"

"it was a fine and wise provision of nature which hid the future from mortals, for who, knowing all that was to befall him, would choose to live?"

"Perhaps," she had replied, "if one really did know, he could change his future."

"Not so. The reasoning is fallacious, for if the future could be changed, then his foreknowledge would have been wrong and the future he had foreseen would not have been his real future at all.

"No, Madge, a man could as easily change his past as his immutable future. Seeing his life as a whole, he would find that little unconsidered events in his past had caused deviations through the years, as a misplaced pebble on the watershed can change the course of the rivulet and eventually affect the strength of the river.

"Now, if a man could but return into his past, remove those distant causes and have his life to live again, what a desirable thing that would be! But the future cannot be changed and neither can the past - we have only the present."

But could the past be changed? Only in memory did the past live now. Then let her go back in memory and search for the deviation which had caused her life to be what it had been.

She must find that deviation, the exact infinitesimal fraction of a second that, taken in the wrong way, had changed, beyond repair, all her possible unformed future and brought her down the years to this dark stairway leading to the river.

Skip then, the years of misery and degradation! Pass over the dirty alleys and byways. Back, farther back, to the stage doors and hotels of the little towns, with which she was so familiar. Forget them and press on - deeper into the past!

There was her name high in the lights of the city, but the moment of deviation was not there! Other stages, other hotels, champagne, pearls - nights of hectic living, days of restless sleep. Back, back, further back!

Back to a rose-perfumed night of June!

SHE opened her eyes and looked up into the dim face of the man who held her. She cuddled deeper into the nook of his arm, feeling his strength about her like a protecting wall. Shortly his life would be her life, his fortune her fortune. Years without drudgery, years with glamour, sparkle - LIFE!

She sighed happily and raised her lips to be kissed. Sweetly, distant from the dance pavilion, drifted strains of music.

She hummed:

"Margie, I'm always thinking of you, Margie."

"I'm always thinking of you, Margie!" and the impetuous, passionate kiss stopped both the humming and her breath.

"What a dear you are," she gasped, laughing. "Will you always be like that, Arnold?"

"Always and a day, honey. Don't you know it?"

"Perhaps. But suppose some day you say to yourself, quite quietly, of course, when I can no longer dance so well, when my voice is a little edgy - 'Why, what am I doing here? She's passe!'

"I had a dream, I think, about this, when I was a little, little girl, a dream I couldn't understand. I was always dreaming such horrible dreams! For years and years I was so frightened! Almost every night I walked in my sleep, because of them. And some have since come true and brought me sorrow. I wish I could remember what I dreamed about you!"

The arm tightened about her.

"Maybe I have been a little wild, honey, but a man gets tired of wandering. You and I will go far. We'll be topnotchers, I tell you. We'll have the best act in the big time, but without all that, if you were lame, or couldn't sing a note, I'd love you."

"I wonder. I thought I'd always love Paul -"

"That clod? Forget him. You're with me tonight, tomorrow night and all the nights from now on."

She began to laugh hysterically. "How funny! Paul said that when he proposed to me! Just exactly those same words!"

He looked nervously out of the

coupe's rear window. "Not so loud, honey, somebody might hear you."

"Afraid?" There was a slight tinge of scorn in the tone. "I'm giving up my home, my husband, my reputation. Everything I have, and you're afraid to be seen with me!"

With a little twist she freed herself from the encircling arm and sprang out of the car.

All at once, it seemed that a little warning bell jangled in her brain. This was the turning point of her life! In this second she could make the decision that would affect all her years to come. Should she re-enter the car and make up, or should she shut the door?

His hand was outstretched but not to seize, only to urge. Her choice was free. Should she?

"Get in, you little fool!" he said, rudely, harshly. "I'll have your name in lights on Broadway in six months. You'll never see a chance like this again. We'll coin money!"

Suddenly she saw with dreadful clarity what she had been about to do, what she must escape from. She slammed the door.

"No, Arnold, we're through, finished! I never want to see you again. I'd die before I'd go away with you. Find some other girl who can dance and sing! I'm going back to Paul!"

She ran sobbing through the dark woods towards the distant music that sang as though to mock her:

"Bought a home and ring and everything for Margie!"

AFTER that one secret lapse, she was a faithful wife, but more than mere fidelity is needed for a happy home and her home life was not happy.

An atrocious housekeeper, her slovenliness drew constant cutting remarks from her not-too-patient husband. Sparks flew as her quick spirit clashed against the sullen flint of his determination to enjoy a neat and peaceful existence. Quarrels were followed by mutual repentance, and hidden ill-feelings that would not, could not die.

A breach once begun, widens swiftly. There were times when each

FANTASY TALES

felt like a stranger to the other, as the home became only a house, and it seemed that any change would be better than to continue thus sordidly.

Yet for a long time there was no definite break. Children might in the end, have kept them together, but there were none and their interests in life also lay apart. "I gave up a career to marry you," she once wept. "I could have gone to business college and made something of my life. But I didn't, and look what I got! You'll never be anything but a dumb, flat-footed cop!"

He did not answer, but nowadays he seldom did. Soon he went quietly out to his beat and left her to another lonely day.

The depression brought its changes and economies, little privations, reduced wages - a cheaper apartment, then a tenement.

Still they clung together in a shifting, crashing world, united by despair, needing each other even as their different natures repelled. The small extravagances which alone had made her life bearable for her, were now no longer possible and temper was held in check even less often than before.

A chance word precipitated the final quarrel which ended when she said, calmly and deliberately: "I can understand now, how a woman can take an axe and finish off her whole family!"

The last words were shouted at a slamming door.

Returning late, he found her asleep. The words he had intended to speak were left unspoken. He would apologise tomorrow. With patient sympathy he bent and kissed her, then with a weary sigh, stripped off his wet clothing and went to bed. It was a bad night.

Long later when she was positive he was sound asleep, her hand stole beneath her pillow and found the staghorn handle of the carving knife she had secreted three hours before.

Then - Blood, Horror! Frenzied, fantastic, unconsidered, unplanned flight into the storm! Aimless walking, finally an empty taxi.

There was less than a dollar in her purse. She gave it all to the

driver. "Take me north, as far as this will carry me. I want to get out of the city."

Immediately the words were spoken she regretted them. Had she said the right thing? Would he suspect from her manner that something was wrong? Apparently not, for he touched his cap brim casually, flipped up the flag and started, threading through the occasional downtown traffic almost driven from the streets by the inclemency of the weather.

THE warmth of the cab made her drowsy. He had to speak twice to rouse her. "This all right, lady?"

"Oh! Where are we?"

And then she knew - "Yes, quite all right. I have friends across the river."

"Give me the address and I'll take you there. This is a bad neighbourhood."

"No, I'll walk. The cold will clear my head. It's only a short distance."

The cab door clicked behind her.

He called something after her, but the closed window and the wind in her ears muted the words below her hearing.

She hurried on, feeling his unbelieving eyes upon her back. Would he follow? Did he suspect that something was not as it should be?

No! Her purposeful manner had misled him. There was the mutter of the engine as he turned about. Yonder the red eye of the tailight vanished into the storm.

She had crossed the bridge and come to the spot before she consciously realised where she was. The driving sleet in her face and the harsh wind had combined with her distress to produce an effect like stupor. She moved more or less directly to her objective.

Now that she had arrived, her senses cleared. Before her were wet icy steps leading down, and beyond - darkness and oblivion for a lost soul.

She strained her eyes to peer into the watery dark. Was someone already there? Was that a huddled shape, crouched in wet rags, in the corner where the bridge abutment met the wall? She shook her head and dashed away the rime from

her eyelashes. No, it was a trick of her vision. No one was there.

Lights fell upon her from a slowly moving car, rolling to a stop. Wet tires squealed upon the icy street. Cruisers, searching the city, searching for her? That taxi-driver! She had been recognised!

Steeling herself, she started down the slippery steps that led to the river - and rest.

Just for one last second she leaned, eyes closed, against the icy wall, near the bridge abutment.

"Oh, Lord!" she whispered passionately. "Why did I have to come to this? If only I hadn't married Paul! If only I had gone to business college and forgotten him.

"If I could live my life over again, live that one second over again, I would say,

"'No! No! No!'"

NO. I AM so sorry, Paul, but I have to say it." Her voice trembled just a little as she raised her eyelids and looked at him fairly. She hoped he would not notice the quaver. At least her will was firm and even his warm kiss, his strong clasp could not swerve her resolution. She was confident.

Yet, she fended him away when he sought to draw her close. The hammock swung gently - like a cradle, she thought, the cradle she would never rock.

"But why? Margaret, darling - why? We love each other?"

This was terrible, much worse than she had expected, yet she could not draw back now.

"I love life more, Paul. I want luxuries, excitement, adventure. I want knowledge. All those, Paul. I would never make you a good wife, I am too restless, too discontented."

"Well, I know I'm not much!"

Now his dignity was ruffled. He was like a small boy, she thought. She could not let him know she loved him. She must be hard, ruthless, if she was to turn aside her destiny. She must hurt him!

"That's just it, Paul, I want things that you can't give me."

"I can give you - love."

Now he was standing over her.

She would not look up, she must not! Would he take her in his arms again and kiss her fears away? She knew this time her resolution would break like spring ice.

Paul - Paul! Hold me close and mold my future for me! Paul!

Now he was going. He had not caught her agonized thought. He would never come back.

Paul!

She could call him, yet!

The gate clicked. Again there rushed over her the memory of that dream, that dreadful, torturing dream that was somehow realer than real.

A night of blood, of storm - paul lying dead in blood-soaked sheets - blood on that knife! Ice in the air, in her heart - ice on the steps leading toward the black river.

He was gone beyond recall, yet she softly cried after him: "I did love you, Paul, so much! And I'll never marry anybody now, never in all my days."

YEARS followed years. There were years of study, of preparation. Years of secretarial work. Long, lonely years of adhering to her secret vow. Years of denying, of hurting others as she had hurt Paul, while her heart seemed to slowly wither, becoming dry, indurated.

Drab years spent at desks, her mind weary with business, drearily concerned with depressions, recessions, market quotations. Then feeling herself gray before her natural time, knowing herself respected, feared for her power by her underlings, distantly admired by her equals. Treated as a man among men in the world she had chosen, she lived a neutral life without other strong interests than her work.

The years passed slowly over her in their relentless march, bringing new honours. From secretary to head buyer was one step, on to district manager was second. Her savings brought her partnership; death and her business acumen made her head of the firm. Carmichael & Klein, Furriers, prospered.

Then at long last, on the Fifth Avenue windows, in Dun and Brad-

FANTASY TALES

street's, in *Who's Who In America*, the name Carmichael meant a great deal.

She sat alone one night in a lighted office, thinking, after the books had been locked away. Somewhere in the warehouse, the watchman was making his rounds, but if he was anywhere at hand just at present, the sound of sleet against the window hid his movements.

Long ago she had regretted her weak moment of superstition and that dream so pregnant of omen had become overlaid by life and almost forgotten, but the driving patter of the sleet brought it vividly back to her now.

Would events have come about as she had imagined them, if she had said, "Yes" to Paul? Could a slight turning from the path bring one to such a different end as the way she had trod had brought her?

She looked at her turquoise in-crusted Gruen. Eleven thirty. Stevens would be waiting in the Rolls. The work was done, it was only ennui which had brought her here at all.

SHE yawned, stretching like a man and threw her head back, to gaze straight up into the dark interior of a sack descending silently upon her head. Instantly, she rolled out of the chair to the floor. A crushing weight fell upon her legs, a harsh grip pinioned her hands behind her. She opened her mouth to call to the watchman and received in it a choking wad of waste as a gag.

It was then she knew it was useless to struggle or hope for aid. One of the men was the watchman, another a discharged employee, the third a man whom she did not know, but whom she felt she had seen before in a dream and could not in any conceivable circumstance, forget. A scarred cheek, and a missing lobe on his right ear would see to that!

The watchman tried to put the bag over her head again, but the stranger who obviously gave the orders, motioned him to desist.

"No use in that," he growled. "She knows you and she'll know me, if ever she sets eyes on me again

- won't you, old lady?"

She could only mumble, but she did that much and managed to nod her head.

"Well, we'll have to see to it then, that you don't," he chuckled and they went out, closing the door behind them.

They were away for what seemed a long time, while she listened to the pecking sleet and wondered if Stevens would become alarmed and call for her. Finally the door opened again, but it was not Stevens who entered.

The watchman and the other subordinate picked her up and, preceded by the scarred man, they passed through the echoing warehouse toward the rear entrance.

Rage filled her, to see the many empty hooks where costly furs had swung, but she was hurried on, unable to remonstrate, at such a pace that even the watchman grumbled: "Slow down, will you, Arnold? We can't see!"

Then, out of the warehouse and into a large sedan. She was unceremoniously thrown, on bales and bags of furs - and so, off through the storm.

With her head below the level of the window, she could not guess at her route, but kept working with tongue and teeth at the gag which was suffocating her. At length she spat it out, just as the brakes were applied and the wet tires squealed on the icy street.

The driver, Arnold, looked back over his shoulder and snarled: "Come on, hurry it up! Let's get out of here."

They dragged her out, neck and heels, and she could see. The icy scud hid the lights of the distant city, but before her was the heavy railing of a bridge and the first steps of a flight leading down.

She thought she saw a dark figure standing below, looking back, nearly down the steps, almost beyond her range of vision. She could not be quite sure, yet she screamed, "Help! Help!"

A violent blow dazed her and she could feel warm wetness on her neck, but she was not unconscious as they picked her up again.

"This must be a dream," she daz-

edly thought, "but I haven't had such a bad one since I was a little girl and scared my mother, because I walked in my sleep to get away from those dreams. How foolish these thugs will seem when I wake up!"

She chuckled quietly, as she felt herself being carried down the long icy stairway leading toward the river.

IT WAS very dark in the corridor and a draft blew cold against her bare ankles and knees beneath her nightdress. By the very absence of the night light always burning in her bedroom, she knew instantly that she had climbed, yet again in her sleep, the five flights of stairs leading to the attic and had been wandering about, hag-ridden by a dream.

She could feel the tears wet upon her cheeks because of the dream. In the dream she had first thought of blood, then sleet, which, melting upon her, was drenching her skin.

It must have been the storm outside which had caused the dream; and that was another odd thing, because every night that she had walked thus in her sleep, either raindrops, hail or sleet had resounded upon the unsheathed roof of the echoing attic as though she stood within an empty drum.

She felt weak and dizzy and she knew that even yet she was not fully awake, for tears still flowed. She could not, would not stand another of these dreams.

What if her mother did not come sometime? The landing was only four steps wide! Twice she had been two steps from the edge, once, the last time, teetering, rocking on the very brink, the last step - emptiness!

Yet - she gasped at the enormity of the swift thought, the awful blasphemy of it. Would it not be better if she had taken the last step? Suppose the dreams she had been having would some day come true? One little second of firm resolve would forever prevent the dreadful possibilities of the future from ever becoming real!

In the corridor, at a distance, she heard swift steps, searching

frantically, running now. That would be her mother, she knew, hunting for her little sleep-walking daughter. Just as before, she would be found on the verge of the stairwell.

She would be drawn back if she did not hurry, drawn back to safety and to walk through the long years again. Turn and twist as she might, she would be directed unyieldingly to one inexorable end - the end of every dream.

She must hurry. This was the crucial factor of her life, the deciding second, the one deviation from which return would be impossible! A bright light fell upon her face!

How very, very strange! Mother was behind her in the corridor, calling, running - yet there she was before her, too, beckoning, smiling, her eyes full of love and understanding! And how her robes shone!

She stepped forward across the landing, to mother's embracing arms - three - four - She took the fifth step.

The wind was in her ears as she fell, and a sharp keen sound. It was her mother's agonized cry, it was the squeal of wet tires on an icy pavement, it was the mournful sound of a tugboat on the river - it was a policeman's whistle.

She was smiling, as she fell into the abyss of eternity. She would not be hurt, she would not strike - people never did in dreams - she would not wake from this dream.

THE patrolman flashed his light into the corner again.

"Aye, it's Meg, right enough," he said to his companion, unfeelingly, "the end ye'd be expectin' for the auld rip."

"Was she a bad one, then?" the other queried.

"Hm-m-m." The grunt was eloquent. "Give us a hand with her, noo." His associate was a devout man and doffed his cap. "Faith then, I'll not be doubting your word, if you say it, but I hope I have as easy an hour of my passing as she had. Twenty years have I

FANTASY TALES

covered the water front and never before seen a face like yon.

"Why she looks as peaceful and

contented as a baby asleep in the arms of her mother!"



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Readers of our last issue will remember with delight the Frances Garfield *Weird Tales* reprint we published, *Don't Open That Door*. To recap, the authoress is the wife of Manly Wade Wellman (who is also featured in this issue). Frances has begun writing fiction again after some forty years and we are certainly glad to have had a hand in this revival! Besides appearing in *Fantasy Tales*, Frances has a new story appearing in Stuart Schiff's *Whispers* magazine and has recently sold another tale, *Come to the Party*, to Stuart's annual hardback anthology, *Whispers III*. Totally different from her contribution last issue, the story which follows is, this time, not a reprint but a first publication for...



"Cat," he heard a hoarse whisper. "Ugly cat."

The Elementals

By FRANCES GARFIELD

Illustration by JIM PITTS

JIMMY'S round yellow eyes watched old David Ruffner rise stiffly from his rocking chair to turn off the TV. Jimmy liked the old man and hated to hear him grunt so wearily with every move. "That's about it for today, Mary," wheezed David, and swallowed his blood-pressure pill dry.

Frail little Mary Ruffner spread a newspaper by Jimmy's basket and set down the bowl of hot milk that

she knew he would like to drink before he went to sleep. David carefully adjusted the fire screen in front of the smouldering hearth. Then David and Mary joined hands and started up the carpeted stairs. Jimmy had spent a busy day scurrying all over the neighbourhood, he mused, but David and Mary seemed a lot tider than he. He jumped to the top of the bookshelf to watch them mount to the floor above.

FANTASY TALES

There were piles of books there, about hauntings, unsolved mysteries, ancient matters into which David Ruffner liked to dip. Jimmy rubbed his furry honey-coloured chin against a massive book that lay open. A soft purr rose from him, like foam above a good glass of beer. A pink yawn cracked his jaws, but he shrugged off sleep because, with David and Mary absent, Jonathan and Rebecca would appear.

These were his good friends. They'd owned this old house long years before and had sworn never to leave it or each other, and they hadn't. The flu epidemic of 1917 had killed them within hours of each other, but they still lingered happily. They loved Jimmy, and Jimmy loved them. He hoped David and Mary were finding the easy sleep of the old. He scrambled down from the shelf and tiptoed upstairs to look.

He reached the landing where the stairs turned right. In the small, thick-paned window, something fluttered. A night bird? He put his forepaws on the sill to peer into the dark.

And found himself staring into a face.

It was shaggy, like uncut grass, like a big black bush, with three-cornered eyes that blazed greenly at him. Next moment, it dropped out of sight.

Had he seen it? Or had he imagined it? He hurried on to the bedroom door. Mary's gentle, rhythmic snore and David's deeper one filtered through the door. Then he padded back downstairs, rushing past the window, not looking this time.

Stepping high on the textured carpet, he went to his dish and drank gratefully of the warm milk. Then he scaled a huge maple break-front. It was loaded with souvenirs of trips David and Mary had taken. Among them was propped a forked piece of spiky coral the Ruffners had brought back from a beach resort. Jimmy had heard David say that the hot sun warmed his old bones, heard him say they'd go again next summer. Jimmy welcomed their holidays. Young Chuck Coppard from next door came every day to feed him and change his sand pan.

And meantime Rebecca and Jonathan came and went at will, even by daylight. Jimmy pawed the coral appreciatively. Then he jumped down and headed, plumed tail high, for the kitchen. There he sprang upon his high stool by the table and sat down to wait.

A misty haze gently drifted into the dim room. It parted in two, each part taking shape. One was like the shadow of a man, the other like a slender woman.

"Lovely night," said the voice of Jonathan.

"Giving our house back to us," replied Rebecca, as though she smiled. The two clouds moved close to each other, seemed to kiss.

"Hey, Jimmy," said Jonathan, and Jimmy said, "Hello," because these could understand his speech as he understood theirs. Their conversation was better than the aged talk of David and Mary, because he could join in. "Are you folks all right?" he asked as they sat down.

"All right, except for an unpleasant rumour that's drifting around," said Rebecca. "The city's ordered the dismantling of the rest of those old houses down where the railroad used to run. That means that some of Our Kind must go house-hunting."

"And Our Kind needs our kind of house," said Jonathan. "I don't want to be inhospitable, but I hope they don't try to crowd in here."

"Just now," said Jimmy, wonderingly. "I saw something strange through the stairway window."

They listened while he told about it. "Maybe I just imagined it," he finished.

"I hope so," said Jonathan. "I hope you have that good an imagination."

Rebecca held up a shadowy finger. "What's that scurrying noise down in the cellar?" she asked.

"Now you're imagining things," Jonathan chuckled.

"Maybe it's a mouse," spoke up Jimmy. "I'll go see."

"There hasn't been a mouse in this house for years," Rebecca said. "They moved out without stopping to pack when you moved in."

"Except for the three you caught the first day," added Jonathan.

"I'll find out," said Jimmy. He was off the stool, moving silently through the open cellar door.

Darkness was there, heavy on the wooden steps. And the noise, stealthy, enigmatic. But not a mouse. A voice.

"Good place," something whispered to something else.

"Get people out of here..."

Jimmy's eyes had adjusted. He could see. Standing on the concrete floor below, something with shaggy, matted hair. It seemed to have arms and legs, strangely jointed.

"Cat," he heard a hoarse whisper. "Ugly cat."

"You get out of here, and fast!" Jimmy snarled down.

Then something smashed into him.

He flew off balance, bumped down the stairs, hitting every step. He tried to whirl over, get his feet under him, but he rolled on, all the way to a thudding impact on the concrete. For a moment he lay, dizzy, throbbing. He felt as if an iron shoe had struck him. He looked wildly around. The shape, or shapes, did not show themselves. Still groggy, he got to his feet and ran shakily up the steps to the door above.

"What happened?" It was Jonathan, his cloud shape stood waiting.

Jimmy pushed his bruised shoulder through the door, and against the edge to make it swing shut. He waited to hear the click of the catch. Then: "At least I don't seem to have any broken bones, but -"

"What happened?" Rebecca echoed Jonathan.

"Something threw me down the stairs," Jimmy managed to gasp unhappily.

"Something down there?" demanded Jonathan.

"Several somethings - talking. And - sinister." He could think of no other word. "At least they didn't follow me out of there." He looked up at his two friends. "Are they the things you say will be house-hunting?"

"They don't sound like Our Kind," said Rebecca. "I wonder -"

Jonathan had drifted to the cellar door. "I don't hear anything. I hope Jimmy drove them away."

Jimmy used his tongue to explore his amber fur for bruises.

"But what if they come back?" Rebecca stammered.

Jimmy made up his mind to something. "I'll visit Zora Harkey."

The Rebecca-mist shifted as though turning toward him. "Isn't she a witch?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "And a friend. She can understand what I say, like you people. She can help. I hope so, anyway."

DAWN stole into the kitchen.

Rebecca and Jonathan faded into the shadows. Jimmy, crouched on guard at the cellar door, heard the first mocking-bird begin its song. Finally, David tottered downstairs to make coffee. Bending down, he patted Jimmy on the head.

"What's the matter, boy, don't you feel well?" he piped.

Jimmy stretched his back. It was still very sore.

"Here." David trickled something crackly from a package into a dish on the table before the high stool. "Have that while breakfast is cooking."

When the coffee perked, David carried a cup upstairs to Mary, and the two returned in robes and slippers to fry sausage and eggs. Jimmy sat on his stool to eat from a saucer of minced good things. Then he trotted outside to wash himself and think. He did both until he heard the court house bell strike nine times. Then he trotted off to see Zora Harkey.

Few people visited Zora Harkey's little cottage on the edge of town, so cloaked in autumn-foliaged trees that it couldn't be seen from the road. Jimmy made his way up the mossy footpath to the yard. Zora sat on her little doorstep, eating a bowl of porridge. She did not look like a witch. She was young, beautiful. Black hair fell like a storm upon her shoulders. Silver-grey eyes watched through spectacles like shell-framed window panes. Her skin was tawny, her lips were like petals. She wore a robe of dark blue stitched in silvery patterns.

"Have you come to breakfast?" she asked Jimmy.

"I've come to talk." He sat down

FANTASY TALES

on a broad stone below the doorstep. "We've got trouble at my house. We need your help."

She smiled above her spoon. "Old Mr. Ruffner doesn't believe in the kind of help I might give. Remember all those books he reads, wise and foolish? He believes in them. But all right. What is the trouble?"

She listened intently to Jimmy's story. Once or twice she asked questions. At last she put down the empty bowl and nodded.

"It's perfectly logical, Jimmy," she said. "And not so good. Your visitors want the house."

"You mean, haunt it? Like Jonathan and Rebecca?"

"Not like them." She shook her proud, dark head. "They're not spirits of the departed. Maybe not spirits at all, as you understand them. In certain books of wisdom, they're called elementals."

"Elementals?" Jimmy repeated. "Like oxygen, hydrogen, carbon?"

"No, like in the archaic sense of the word - fire, air, earth. Elementals have been around a long time, Jimmy, long before complex things like men and women. They're not disembodied ghosts. You found out, the hard way, that they can be material and dangerous."

"Do they have powers?" was Jimmy's next question.

"Indeed they do. Very impressive powers. In fact, primitive people have worshipped elementals as gods."

"Cats have been worshipped as gods, too," reminded Jimmy. "By the Egyptians, who weren't primitive at all."

She smiled. "Keep that in mind, it may help you. Anyway, I'd judge that they've been in those deserted old houses that will be torn down. A deserted house is what elementals want. If they get into your house, they'll drive out your spirit friends, they'll contrive to destroy David and Mary Ruffner." She looked at him. "And destroy you, too. They want no normal life around them."

"Not gods at all," said Jimmy dismally. "Demons."

"That's another old word, it goes back to the ancient Greeks." Zora understood things like that. "Daemons, that's how it was written. Homer calls daemons gods, and gods

daemons."

"I'm not classically educated," said Jimmy. "and I don't understand what you're getting at. I only understand that I'm in a fix, and need help."

"Maybe I can do something."

Zora rose and took her empty porridge bowl inside. When she came out, she carried a curved knife that gleamed whitely.

"That looks like silver," said Jimmy.

"Because that's what it is. The old, old instructions say to use a silver pruning knife."

She walked to the dark green hedge at the side of the house, cut a sprig, and brought it back. "Here. We can try this."

Jimmy looked at the tiny, scale-like leaves on the little branch. "That's only salt cedar."

"In the old countries it's called tamarisk." Zora thought a moment, her lips moving. "Those evil ones will be put to flight," she said, as though she repeated a formula. "The tamarisk, the powerful weapon of Anu, in my hands I hold."

"What?"

Zora pushed up her spectacles and smiled. "I was quoting an old Assyrian spell against demons, or daemons - the Assyrian word was *Ekimmu*. Here, take it. Your visitors won't be able to endure it. Show it to them - push it in their faces, or whatever they have for faces. Drive them out of the house. I doubt if they'll come back again."

Jimmy was impressed. He believed. "Thank you, Zora."

He clutched the twig in his mouth and trotted home. Entering the parlour, he dropped his prize into his softly lined sleeping basket. Every time he passed it, all that long day, he smiled his personal triumphant smile, lips together and eyes narrowed. Evening would come. If the visitors came, he would make them go.

David spent the afternoon reading and puffing at his meerschaum pipe. He dipped into one book after another, his favourite books of demonology and occultism. Watching, Jimmy wondered if they mentioned tamarisk. Mary moved here and there, cleaning the house.

"David," she said, "have you heard any strange sounds - kind of like voices around the house?"

"Just yours, dear," he replied, puffing, "and once or twice, Jimmy cat here seemed to remark something."

"Well, maybe it's my imagination, but things are somehow odd. I was down in the cellar, and there was a clutter I didn't remember. Some newspapers stirred up, and a couple of jars of canned fruit off the shelf."

David looked up. "Anything broken?"

"No, thank heaven."

"Then there's nothing to worry about."

Supertime came, with spare ribs and kraut. Jimmy sat on his stool to eat his share. After that, the Ruffners watched favourite TV programmes. At last Mary put out the bowl of hot milk beside Jimmy's basket.

"What's this thing Jimmy's brought in?" she wondered.

David turned off the TV set and came to look. "Did we forget to tidy up his basket today?" he asked Mary. "He dragged this old branch into it."

And he picked up the tamarisk sprig and tossed it onto the coals on the hearth. A harsh sizzling sound rose up, the fire seemed to gleam purple.

"I'm glad I found that," said David to Jimmy. "You might have scratched yourself on it." Jimmy quivered all over.

David and Mary took hands and plodded slowly upstairs. Jimmy watched them, with a feeling as though an icy stone had been dropped on his heart. From down in the cellar came a stir of movement, something ponderous - maybe triumphant.

"Jimmy, they're down there." That was Rebecca's voice, hushed with fear. Her cloudy presence was in the room. "Will you be able to -"

"David burned up my tamarisk," Jimmy half-wailed. "It's too far to go for more. Who knows what will happen if I go?"

Heavy movement below stairs.

"Who knows what will happen if you stay?" asked Jonathan. "How

could you stop them from what they'll do?"

"I don't know," said Jimmy, honestly not knowing. He put his paws on David's chair to look at the books on the table. "These are magic, the sort of thing Zora uses. If I could only read them - I never learned -"

"I can read." The Jonathan cloud stooped over the books. "But I can't open them. Here, this one is *The Secrets of Magic*. It might help. Can you get it open?"

Jimmy was up on the table at once. He pushed the book to the edge and it fell and bounced on the floor.

"They're at the cellar stairs," Rebecca was saying. "I think they're talking down there. About us."

"Open the book, Jimmy," Jonathan said distractedly, and Jimmy dragged up the cover of the book, began to paw a page over, then another.

"Wait, wait." Jonathan's misty form was doubled close to the floor above the book. A tag of vapour that must have been a hand went to a page. "Look here."

"What?" asked Jimmy.

"Here's what it says: 'Put coral in boiled milk and anoint with it, or drink it to -'

"Yes!" cried Jimmy. "Yes!"

He hurled himself scrambling up the breakfront. There was the coral. He had often combed his jaws upon it. He caught it with a hooked paw, harried it to the edge of the shelf and let it tumble to the carpet. At once he was down beside it, grasping it in his mouth.

It was heavier than the spray of tamarisk, but he dragged it to the bowel of milk and tipped it in. He pressed it down with both paws until it was submerged.

Rebecca gave a little breathless squeak of horror. A great, shaggy shape was emerging from the open cellar doorway.

"Go," it threatened. "You go. Go away."

Jonathan and Rebecca had fled across the room. Jimmy pushed his face and his fluffy chest into the warm milk. The coral grated against him.

FANTASY TALES

Anoint with it, that was what Jonathan had read. He turned around to face what had come up from below.

It stood tall, taller than Jonathan's cloudy form, and broader. It seemed as shaggy, as prickly, as a gigantic chestnut burr. Its thickened face grinned, it snarled, it showed teeth like scraps of grey stone. It lifted what must be arms, with rakelike talons.

"Out," it mumbled.

"Out," repeated another face behind it.

Jimmy threw himself.

He heard a breathless howl as his claws sank into gnarly, bushy integument, and he climbed up, as up a rough tree. He jammed his soaked body into that face, hearing the snap of the teeth.

Another howl, broken in the middle. And Jimmy fell heavily to the floor. Writhing around, he searched the air for his adversary.

His adversary was gone. On the carpet fluttered a strew of somethings like ashes. Beyond, loomed another of the things, mouthing words, and Jimmy charged at that.

It did not howl, it gasped. It turned and fled back down the cellar stairs. At the threshold, he saw it scurrying across the floor below. There was another down there, maybe more. But they were all running.

"It's you who'll go!" Jimmy cried down after the fugitives.

He paused where he was, panting. He remembered what Zora had said. *I doubt if they'll come back again.*

No point in pushing the cellar door shut now, when nothing was going to stay in the cellar, nothing evil, nothing dangerous.

Jonathan and Rebecca dropped

wearily above him. They seemed ready to collapse, to fade away.

"They're gone," Jimmy said authoritatively. "All but this one that fluffed off into ashes."

He walked clear of the jumble. Jonathan was stooping above the book.

"It worked," came his voice. "Here's the rest of what it says about the coral and the milk. 'No evil will dare stay when thus met and -'

"What's all that racket down there?" rang David's voice from upstairs.

"Let's get out of here for the time being, Jonathan," begged Rebecca.

They vanished away, smoothly, quietly.

Lights came on. Down the stairs doddered old David, in his pyjamas. In one hand he held a big, rusty revolver. He descended into the sitting room, scowling and peering.

"Did you hear all that commotion, Jimmy?" he demanded.

"What is it?" Mary was asking. She, too, came down, in her quilted bathrobe. Her gray hair was pinned in curlers.

"Look here. Jimmy knocked down one of my books." David picked it up and put it on the table. "And what's all this ashy stuff on the carpet? Did it blow off the hearth?"

"Leave it until tomorrow, dear. I'll clean it up then. What happened?"

David gazed down at Jimmy. "Nobody knows but Jimmy cat. I wish he could talk."

"He looks as if he'd like to tell us," said Mary.

David laughed. "I doubt if it would be very exciting."

Jimmy smiled his smile at them, close-lipped, slant-eyed.

NEXT ISSUE

Kane, The Mystic Swordsman
returns in

THE OTHER ONE
by Karl Edward Wagner



Dave Reeder is best known as the editor of THE BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY BULLETIN which he produced for two years (1978/79). He recently left to co-edit a new semi-professional fiction magazine, FANTASY MACABRE. Here, Dave contributes a short atmospheric piece about...

The Last Trick

By DAVE REEDER

Illustration by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

BENEATH the dark and silent city the blackness stretched, sending cool tendrils out like smoke in the night wind. Then, easing slightly, it edged down the slope, its extremities sliding and rushing before it like spider webs in the coldness. In the darkness it was darker still - a shadow against the night. A shadow of the night now searching, searching.

On the corner beneath the dim street light, silhouetted against the yellowing fog, Mary Cann waited for one last trick before the slow tumble into sleep. Times had been tough, were rough. The big ships now berthed down stream and the rush of sailors was now slowed to a trickle. Times were slow all around. So she waited, waited for one last chance. Here and there in the night, footsteps echoed off the damp and glistening streets, casting shadows of sound around the little back corners and cuts. Yet always they moved by, sometimes crossing to the other side, but always walking by. Five minutes more, she thought to herself. Oh God, let there be just one more. One more for the rent money, for the bare cupboard, just one more. She paced back and forth, her high heels tapping across the night, her shadows growing and fading across the boarded shop fronts. Then all was still, but in some calm way the very night seemed to breathe. The night air sighed wet with its own coldness. Before her in the yellow light her breath smoked out and faded into the stillness.

Twenty feet below, the blackness



"She drowned in the sweet terror of it."

paused, as if to gather its strength. It pulsed there in the dark, seeming almost to absorb the night, the dampness of the night. Then slowly, so slowly, it eased again, creeping, then running like mercury over the mould-encrusted bricks of the old drain, seeming to fill the corners and cracks yet never pausing. There was no need now for stillness; now there was only a hunger. A hunger that pulsed and pulsed again like the softness of the heart - its own rhythm running and flowing, now faster, now slower. Then it paused again, rustles of blackness flowing and rippling over its surface in fluid silence. Again the tendrils crept forward, flowed upward. The bitter scent of the night grew stronger, but the blackness cut through it, slicing through the yellowing fog that billowed down, down through the grille of the storm drain, down to the dark.

Mary stopped once more, listening intently for any sound, any chance. Scrabbling in her bag she pulled out cigarette and lighter, then bending forward she flicked the lighter and, inhaling deeply the acrid smoke, failed to notice the blackness - failed to see how it crept and flowed from the drain,

running now over the ground, swirling around her high heels, smoothing up the slim shins, lingering perhaps a moment at the hem of her jet-black skirt and then...then, in a sudden flash of movement, leaping upward.

She shouted but her throat was dull, the sounds dead and muted in the night's dampness. Her eyes gaped wide as the flame of her lighter was enveloped by a kind of opaque darkness. It smoothed its way up her arms and then, stumbling backward into the doorway, she tripped over the discarded newspapers. Sliding beneath the blackness, she drowned in the sweet terror of it.

It pulsed and glowed in the dark till the glow darkened again and then, sated, it began to slip back, running like crystal water over the ebony rocks of the city street. Like smoke it curled back towards the drain, towards blackness, towards home.

Home in the darkness. Home to rest, to digest until once more, perhaps, that dreadful hunger grew and grew, and could not be denied, could not be ignored. There in the stillness. There in the still darkness.



WELOCOME to our sixth issue. Judging by the response we have received, fears regarding the changeover from full colour to black and white covers have proven unfounded. Most people, it seems, were well pleased with the result last issue and, of course, an important spinoff is that the new stiff covers make the magazine more durable.

It's a pleasure for us to ann-

ounce that numbers 1, 2 and 3 of *Fantasy Tales* are now out of print from us. That's not such happy news for those of you who might wish to buy copies of back numbers. However, though we regard them as O/P, it may still be possible to obtain copies through retail outlets; *Fantasy Tales* is supplied to various SF/Fantasy book dealers throughout the U.K. and U.S.A. Not so good news is our having to

pass on to direct subscribers the recent postal increase: 78p (\$3.00) is the new price when you order direct from us by post, but we hasten to add that the basic cover price remains the same, as it has since *Fantasy Tales* number 1, issued in the summer of 1977! We think you'll agree that's still a fair deal.

In future issues we will be presenting the work of a number of established writers: there's a new story from one of the undisputed masters of modern urban horror, Ramsey Campbell, but in *Wrapped Up* Campbell moves his location to Egypt and an archeological dig. Peter Tremayne, English author of the recent Dracula novels (*Dracula Unborn*, *Revenge of Dracula*) will be featured for the first time in our pages with an unpublished yarn called *Reflections on a Dark Eye*. One of our most skilful craftsman working on an amateur basis and also one of our most consistently popular contributors is Brian Mooney; we will be featuring more work by him and also a writer who has been out of the genre for a while, David Riley. Crossing the Atlantic, we have on hand an HPL spoof by Darrell Schweitzer and next issue our lead story is by Karl Edward Wagner (a 'Kane' short, unpublished in the U.K.). We have poetry by Harold Munn and Steve Eng and a whole file of stories from less well known practitioners of Fantasy and Horror.

Response to our last issue was good - in fact, we received more letters of comment than ever before. Please do keep writing, we want and need constructive criticism, and don't forget to vote for your favourite stories in this issue. Turn to page 38 for the results on last issue's contents. There's nothing more to add this time around, so we'll leave it to our correspondents to have their say in the cauldron of comments which follow...

A GOOD READ

David Riley of Accrington, Lancs, writes: "The standard of the stories printed in issue 5 I found to be, on the whole, an improvement on earlier issues, especially with regard to

Brian Mooney's *For the Life Everlasting*, which was not only well written but carried a convincingly nasty twist in the climax - a particularly nasty twist, in fact. The use of Barabbas - by its originality - helped to give this short story an extra flavour that added to its enjoyment. Brian is a writer whose early work I enjoyed and I hope that many more short stories from him appear in *Fantasy Tales*. He is a definite asset. Likewise, *Just Another Vampire Story* by Randall Garrett had a sharp twist in the tail, though the story as a whole lacked the sense of realism of the Brian Mooney one. Nevertheless, it was enjoyable. I was a bit disappointed with the Brian Lumley collaboration with Lovecraft. The Lovecraft original was only a minor work from HPL. Brian did a decent job in extending this into a kind of story, but I must admit to having found it fairly tedious stuff, and worst of all, predictable. The Dave Carson illustrations for it, though, were superb, justifying its inclusion on their merits alone. *Extension 201* by Cyril Simsa was far too long, lacking any real narrative drive. I had to slog a bit to get through this tale. Shortened to about half its length it might have been better. *Don't Open That Door* by Frances Garfield, although reprinted from *Weird Tales*, was the weakest story in the issue and not really worth reprinting in my opinion. It's a case of a good idea being watered down to the kind of standards one would have expected being acceptable to a woman's magazine. The Jim Pitts illustration for it, though, was superb, conjuring up an image of festering evil which, though sought, the story itself could not produce. I like the new black and white cover, with the red and yellow title-heading. It adds a nice air of the macabre to the magazine which earlier, full colour covers seemed to lack. In general the quality of the illustrations in the magazine are what impress me most and what make this magazine as good as it is. After all, this is a magazine of new short stories; at their poorest, they

FANTASY TALES

still give a good read."

FINE TRIBUTE

A brief note from, Robert Bloch, Los Angeles, California: "The magazine is a fine tribute to WT, but - more importantly - excellent and entertaining in its own right, and I congratulate you and all concerned. My warmest best wishes for the deserved success of *Fantasy Tales*!"

BEST SO FAR

Peter Bayliss, from Rugby, Warwickshire, writes: "First of all, I would like to say that I have read all five issues of *Fantasy Tales* and consider No.5 to be the best so far. It is a pity you've had to abandon your eye-catching colour covers, but I am not surprised - they must have been costing a small fortune. The new cover to No.5 is perhaps not so eye-catching, but is excellent all the same. Anyway, it's the contents of the magazine that are important - and the last issue is an improvement in that respect (in the case of FT it is an improvement from good to better rather than from bad to good)! Jim Pitts' illustrations are a work of art by themselves, and I feel the success of *Fantasy Tales* is in no small part due to his amazing artwork."

WELL CHOSEN

From, H. Warner Munn, Tucoma, Washington: "I found the magazine most interesting. Yes, I like the format, the appearance and the contents. All well chosen, I may say. Among the stories, I was glad to see *The Thing in the Moonlight*. I remember Lovecraft reading it to me and W. Paul Cook. Of course, at that time it was incomplete. I had no idea that Brian Lumley would add to it! *Extension 201* was interesting, well written and unpredictable, although I thought that the ending was a little vague and a better one could have been more effective. *For the Life Everlasting* was fine. I could not foresee the end, until almost the last paragraphs and not much has been written about Barabbas. *Don't Open That Door* was well written. I remember *The Forbidden Cupboard* in WT in 1940!"

So long ago! Wish I had my old files, so I could compare this version with the original."

PROFESSIONAL THROUGHOUT

Manly Wade Wellman, the author of this issue's lead story, writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina: "*Fantasy Tales* 5 is a fine one, professional throughout, and the editors manifestly make the most of a modest budget. Don't root against Lloyd's cover; maybe it won't stand out on a newsstand but it's fine on the book itself. Before I opened FT, I was prejudiced in favour of Frances Garfield's *Don't Open That Door*. After I'd read throughout, I still liked it best, not only because I've loved and lived with the lady and her story so many years. I can testify that success comes with tireless revision and polishing. Three cheers for Randall Garrett's *Just Another Vampire Story*, and the twist at the end caught me flatfooted. Brian Lumley well achieved Lovecraft's nightmare adventure in *The Thing in the Moonlight*, Brian Mooney is just far out enough Biblically with *For the Life Everlasting*. Congratulations to Cyril Simsa for his promising first, *Extension 201*. The poems intrigue, and all the art is suitable for framing."

NOT QUITE BEST

From, regular FT artist Alan Hunter, Bournemouth: "Not your best issue artistically. I would rather see proper illustrations by new artists (page 19 was great - really atmospheric) than 'doodles' by established names (referring, of course, to Hannes Bok and Steve Fabian). Regarding the cover, it came as something of a shock at first, but I think I could soon get used to the new presentation. I would like to see a little more of the fantasy element in the cover picture - it is not until after you have read the story that the slight touches of the macabre become apparent. The back cover was a very acceptable piece of art by a name new to me. The story line-up was excellent, as usual. I particularly like the introduction to each story, especially if the author's

name is unknown to me. The biographical details are most interesting. The poetry was as entertaining as usual. Unfortunately, they can hardly be rated alongside complete stories, but do make excellent "fillers" and are appreciated. On the whole, not quite your best issue to date, although it did maintain the high standard set by previous issues."

COVER PREFERRED

Jim Turner of Arkham House Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin, writes: "I don't feel you need be the least bit apologetic regarding FT's monochrome cover. Just as some of the finest horror films have been (intentionally) produced in black and white rather than colour, so have many macabre artists expressly availed themselves of the special shading effects that only a black-on-white technique can provide. I myself prefer your cover on the fifth issue to some (not all) of the full-colour jobs you've presented in the past. Anyway, keep up the good work!"

BACK IN PRINT

From this issue's contributor, Frances Garfield (Wellman) of Chapel Hill, N.C.: "Thanks for *Fantasy Tales* No.5. And thanks for the nice sendoff you gave me and my story. It felt really good to see my name in print again. And to see it in such a good magazine. I can't see any reason to apologise for the cover. I found it attractive and interesting. And as to the story, I was proud to be in company with such good people. *Just Another Vampire Story* really took me in. Congratulations to Randall Garrett. I want to read more of him. To me it's quite a feat to get that much humour into horror. And also it was a pleasure to read Brian Mooney whom I admire so much as a person. And bravo for the art, throughout."

VERY HANDSOME

A short comment from, Ray Bradbury, Los Angeles, California: "Thanks for the copy of *Fantasy Tales*, very handsome. I look forward to reading some of the stories

in the months ahead. Good luck with your magazine in the coming years!"

FULLY PROFESSIONAL

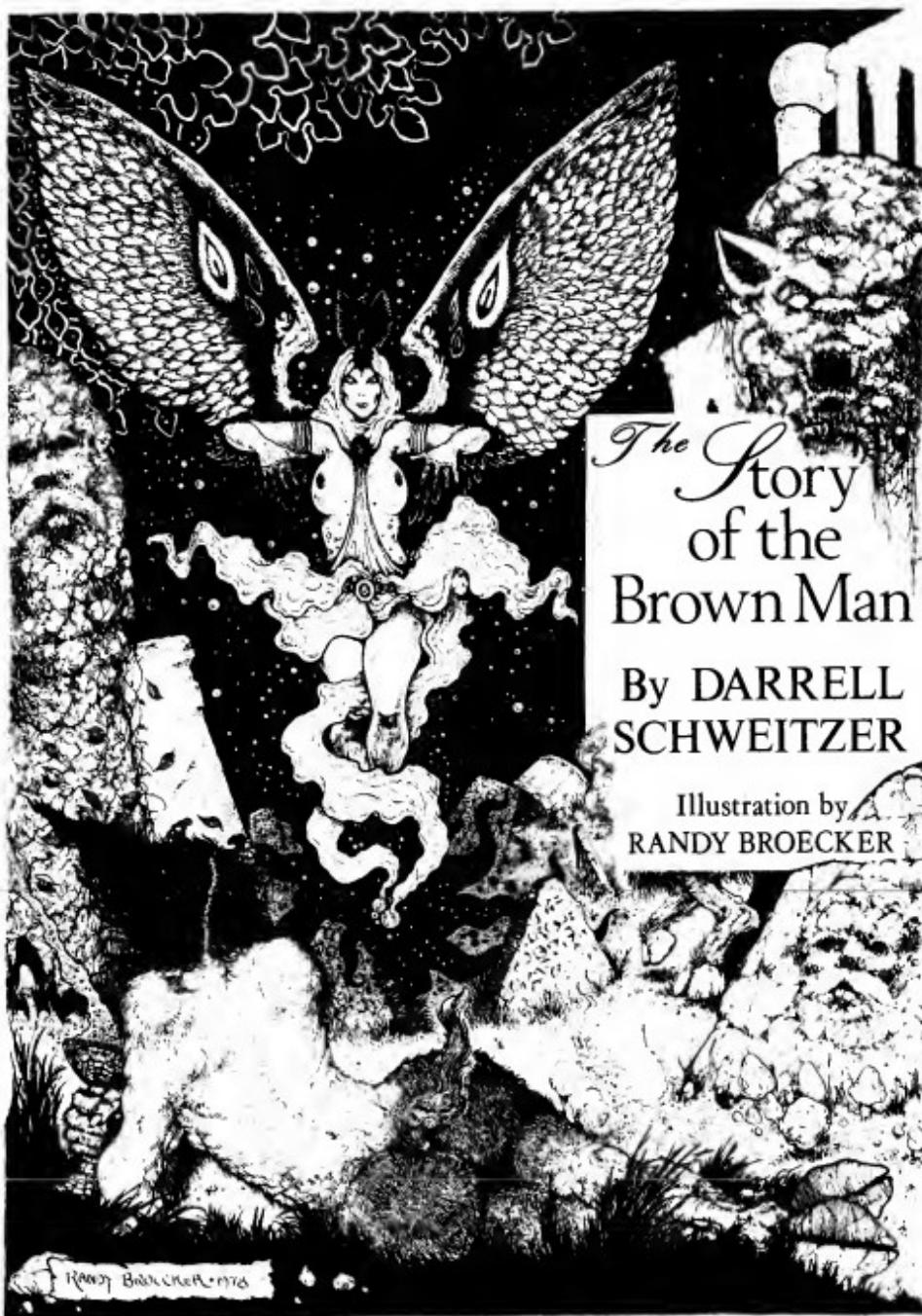
Regular FT author, Brian Lumley, from Bedhampton, Hants., writes: "When I first learned of the black and white covers, I thought maybe you were slipping back. But no, they are beautifully successful! And certainly Lloyd should be congratulated for a superbly eerie cover illo. As for the contents: I think you've found the right balance between illo and story. The visual impact is much improved. In fact, I'd say this was your best issue to date. The Garrett/Garfield stories are probably the best, with Mooney and Sims as close follow-ups. I also liked Ounsley's *Seafarers* greatly, and Munn's piece, too; but let's face it, Munn's been around long enough to know how to put a piece of verse together. For once in his life I found Fabian's art a little off course; but the Carson work for *The Thing in the Moonlight* was exactly right! And then that excellent Jim Pitts illo... A fully professional job, and I can't say more than that."

MOST POPULAR STORY

Let us know which three stories you liked best in this issue of *Fantasy Tales* and why. Your criticism of the stories we print will help us to keep the magazine as you desire it. In the last issue, our WT reprint by Frances Garfield, *Don't Open That Door*, came out front in popularity, closely followed by a tie between *For the Life Everlasting* by Brian Mooney and *Extension 201* by Cyril Sims. Address your correspondence to The Cauldron, FANTASY TALES, 33 Wren House, Tachbrook Estate, London SW1V 3QD, England.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

The illustration for *The Wind-Walker* is by Dave Carson. Alan Hunter illustrated *The Blades of Hell* and the sketch on page 45 is by Andrew Smith. The heading for the *Contents* page is by Jim Pitts and the heading for *The Cauldron* is the work of John Grandfield.



*The Story
of the
Brown Man*

By DARRELL
SCHWEITZER

Illustration by
RANDY BROECKER

RANDY BROECKER • 1978

"At first he did only illusions, but then greater things."

Darrell Schweitzer regularly contributes to both *Amazing* and *Fantastic* magazines and his first novel, *The White Isle*, was serialised in *Fantastic* in April and July this year. Subsequently it will be published by Borgo Press, who are also to publish *Exploring Fantasy Worlds* (originally announced from TK Graphics), an anthology of fantasy criticism in two volumes. *Masters of the Supernatural*, a critical study of Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen and M. R. James is another non-fiction book on which he is working. For Owlswick Press Darrell has edited *Ghosts on the Heavyside Layer*, a Lord Dunsany collection, containing hitherto uncollected stories, essays and plays, with illustrations by Tim Kirk. Owlswick have the author's book-length study of Dunsany's work, *Pathways of Elfland* in the pipeline too. His own short stories have appeared in *Swords Against Darkness 5*, and Paul Collins' anthology *Alien Worlds*. Darrell's most noteworthy appearance of last year was *Divers Hands* in Gerald Page's *Years Best Horror Stories VII*. He is currently writing a fantasy novel set aeons in the future, *The Shattered Goddess*. The story we publish here, Darrell's first appearance in *Fantasy Tales*, originally appeared in Jonathan Bacon's *Fantasy Crosswinds 1* (1977). It is set in the last years of Diocletian's reign, roughly 303-305 A.D., during the last big persecution of Christians. The historical parameters thus defined, we invite you to enter the curious world glimpsed by a youngster...

WHEN I was a boy, long ago, before the reign of the Emperor Constantine, my Uncle Septimus had an estate in the country about five days journey from Naples, and almost every summer my father and mother and I, along with some of our servants, would go there to visit. It is splendid country in that part of the world, with high rocky cliffs overlooking the sea, and green, crop-covered terraces dropping down to meet the waters. The servants would bear us endlessly past cultivated fields, through small forests and villages, along the eternal paved roads, until at last we would come to my uncle's villa and he would be there at the front gate with his wife and chief steward and some of his slaves, waiting to welcome us.

So it was for my sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth years. Often we would spend the entire season there. The air was fresh and free of the harmful humours that infest crowded towns, and the days were always bright and pleasant. There were many things to see and do, and it was a very exciting time for me.

This was not so in the evenings. Then I was bored, for it was in the evenings that my father and my uncle would sit on the porch watching the sun sink red and golden into the distant sea, and before the light grew too dim they would read

from the books in my uncle's library, and talk of such people as Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus, whom I assumed were philosophers or something equally tedious.

Now when this was going on my mother played the harp in another part of the house, and my aunt and the ladies of the household would gather around her and listen, and sometimes sing. The result of these simultaneous doings was that I was supremely bored, for at that age I had no interest whatsoever in the classics, and scarcely any more in music, save for the simple songs I sang to myself. Since there were no boys of my age on the estate except for slaves, and I knew it would be demeaning for one of my rank to associate with them, I felt very lonely on those long summer evenings.

I remember how it was on one particular evening, during the second week of our stay, that I wandered away from the grounds unnoticed. I walked across the courtyard and out the gate, then over the fields. I stopped for a time to watch the slaves as they laboured to finish up their tasks in the fading light, but in a short while I grew tired of that too, and moved on. At length, when the house was out of sight over the top of a rolling hill, and the plowed fields were behind me, I passed through a copse of trees

FANTASY TALES

and came to an ancient and deserted graveyard filled with marble tombs covered with vines and moss. I wandered among them looking at the inscriptions, and it was then that I met the Brown Man.

I had stopped before a particularly large and fine sarcophagus, the stones of which had turned green with age, and on it were carved the images of two maidens holding hands. I ran my fingers over the two - were there twins buried here? - and said aloud, "I wonder what that means."

And very much to my surprise a voice said, "I can tell you if you like."

I turned and beheld the Brown Man emerging from behind a monument. He had obviously been watching me for a few minutes at least. I named him "The Brown Man" to myself at once, because he was darker than most people, though not black like the African slaves my uncle owned. In all he was a very strange person. He wore no clothes at all and was very hairy. His legs were covered with thick fur, and the hair on the top of his head stuck out wildly, like that of a savage. I suppose I was too young to be afraid of him. Or perhaps the tone of his voice put me at ease. In any case I did not run from him.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"My people have no names." He stepped fully into view and it was then that I noticed the strangest of the many strange things about him - his feet. He didn't have toes like a normal man; he had hooves. Round, shiny hooves, like those of a cow. Cloven in the middle.

I gaped at this wonderous thing, but he acted as if nothing were out of the ordinary. He crouched before the two carven ladies, and as he did I noticed that he had a tuft of hair above his rear forming a short tail. He pointed to the tomb image.

"These are the sisters Sleep and Death," he said. "They are the daughters of Oblivion and they rule this place."

"How do you know?"

"Why - why, I can read the

inscriptions. Can't a boy of your age read yet?" He laughed, and whatever fear I might have had of him vanished with the sound.

"I am learning letters a little. I'm trying to read, but it's hard." That was a lie. In truth I was resisting all efforts to educate me with the determination of a spearman in a phalanx facing an onslaught of the enemy. My tutors were two eunuchs named Arcadius and Gallus, and my parents often scolded me for refusing to co-operate with them. I did not yet know even simple Latin, let alone the Greek that marks a man as civilized. The Brown Man was the first would-be teacher I ever listened to.

"Well," he said. "I shall have to explain all these to you."

"All of them?"

"All if you wish."

"Some now, and we'll save some for later." Already I was envisioning a series of mighty meetings. "So be it then," he said, and took me by the hand. He led me deeper and deeper into the graveyard, and if I should have felt any superstitious dread at being in a place of death I did not. His presence was reassuring.

Here and there we would stop before some monument and he would explain the motif on it. We came to one featuring a soldier, and the soldier was falling over, an arrow in his foot.

"That is Achilles. The owner of this grave reminds others of their mortality." Then he told me of Achilles and how he died.

We came to another grave, and around its four sides were a man, a lady, and a lot of pigs.

"Ulysses and Circe. The swine are his crew after she has bewitched them."

And another, with soldiers, a burning city, and a large horse.

"Aeneas fleeing Troy, coming to found Rome." Briefly the Brown Man told me of the origins of our country.

And another.

"This one shows Adonis, who has died, but shall rise again."

And so we went on among the marble tombs, until the evening

was done and the darkness was upon us. Then once I turned around and the Brown Man was with me, and I turned again and he was not. I returned to my uncle's house and found that I had not been missed. My father and uncle had moved inside and by the light of candles and braziers they still pored over the books, and my mother and the ladies no longer played upon the harp, but merely talked softly among themselves. An hour or two passed and everyone retired.

THAT summer was like no other that I had known. Often I was bored in the days for the first time, for daytime activities had paled in the face of expectations of the evening, and as soon as I could I would slip away after the last meal of the day and go to meet my new friend. I should have been at my lessons then, but I escaped this by a simple method. I told Gallus that I was studying Greek with Arcadius, and I told Arcadius that I was studying Latin with Gallus. The two of them never found out that I had deceived them. They may have been scholars but they were not really smart at all. Perhaps eunuchdom does that to a man.

Each evening I would run across the fields with great eagerness and in no time at all I would be at the graveyard and the Brown Man would be waiting, and he would show me all the secrets of the place, and also at times he would take me to the sacred groves in the forest nearby, and sit with me there and tell stories of the ancient heroes. I loved him, and he taught me much, but his manner was not at all that of a teacher. He spoke with enthusiasm and excitement, as if he had witnessed and been involved in the things he spoke of, not merely repeating dry old lessons he had read in a book.

And he worked magic for me. At first he did only illusions, but then greater things. Once he turned me into a worm, so that I might know the ways of living things beneath the earth; and again into a rabbit, to learn of

things of the earth; and a fish to learn of the things of the sea, and finally a bird, that I might soar and see all the world from the air above. And he said to me that I would someday be a great magician, if I followed the true way. But as he said this his face grew long, and his voice melancholy.

"I fear you are one of the last. All these things must perish soon."

"What? What shall perish?"

"The old ways, and even the old gods. People don't honour them anymore. In time they shall all be swept away."

"But I shall honour the gods! I promise!"

"Then try and remember all the things I have told you. Maintain a light in the dark times ahead."

"I shall! I shall!" I tried to draw him out of his gloom. It hurt me to see him unhappy.

"Then I shall do you a great honour. I shall show you the gods. Would you like to see them?"

"See the gods?" This was incredible, impossible. No one can see the gods unless they show themselves to him.

The Brown Man smiled once more. "Come," he said, and he took me by the hand, and by some subtle motion we left the earth and began to fly through the air. My body seemed as light as a cloud. There was no sensation of motion, no weight. I never looked down, never saw the fields and sea receding below us, but I knew that I was flying. The setting red sun grew brighter and brighter before me, until it was yellow and white as in mid-day. It grew and grew until it filled the sky, and yet I felt no heat and no pain. The sun filled all with blinding light, and yet still higher we rose into the very face of it and I forgot all things, even the Brown Man beside me. I was alone in the glory and the light.

And I saw the gods. In the midst of the sun, faint, barely visible, radiant even against the fire-filled sky, I saw them talking among themselves. They stood tall and majestic and their speech came in whispers, like wind and

FANTASY TALES

the rustling of leaves. I knew not a word, for their speech was the language of Olympus. They seemed oblivious to all things around them. Not once did they look up into the heavens or down at the earth. They were sufficient of themselves.

Then, before I knew it, I was again on the earth, by the brook in the middle of the wood. At first I could see nothing in my bewilderment, but at last sight returned and I perceived that the Brown Man was gone. The sun had set and it was night, the moon staring down between the branches of the trees.

IT WAS not many days afterwards that the stranger came. He arrived suddenly in the middle of the night. My uncle arose and came to the gate and greeted him, clasping his hand like an old friend he had dearly wanted to see. I observed all from my window above - I had been unable to sleep that night, my mind awash with marvels - and I saw at once that the newcomer was not a Roman gentleman. He wore no toga, and even in the darkness I could tell that his clothing was ragged and dirty. Also his face sprouted a thick and matted beard, which he did not shave in the manner of a Roman, even after he had been with us for several days.

Still, my uncle seemed to honour him highly. Often they conversed in hushed voices and I overheard little. The stranger's Latin was stilted, often broken, and his accent strange.

No more did my father and my uncle sit on the porch at the end of each day discussing the old writings. No more did the ladies sing to the tune of the harp. Instead all gathered around the newcomer and listened to what he had to say. They revered him and called him "Teacher" although I never knew what he taught, since it was apparently deemed unfit for the ears of little boys. In any case this strange one occupied the adults more intently than ever, and it was easier for me to slip away and meet the Brown Man, so I

never questioned my good fortune very closely.

But then there was a night near the very end of summer, only a few days before we were to leave for the city, when I returned to the house to find a company of soldiers at the door. There were about twenty of them, mounted, and an officer with a red cape and a plume led them. I hid among the bushes and observed all that went on.

The officer was insisting to my father that something was true. My father said it wasn't. The soldiers snickered. My father and the officer argued, and Uncle Septimus came and argued also. The officer commanded his men to dismount and search the house, and they did, and everyone watched them fearfully. When nothing was found they rode away without another word. Masters and servants alike watched them with ashen faces as they vanished down the road. My uncle and father went inside immediately after the soldiers had gone, and I also went in, fearing that something was terribly, terribly wrong.

I remember the scene in the main hall of the house clearly in every detail, even after so long a time. The hall itself was wide with a floor of pink marble. A table and a set of lion-footed chairs of white marble stood in the centre by an indoor fountain. Great pillars held up the roof and cast long shadows over the room, which the coal-filled braziers and flaming torches failed to dispell. Tapestries on the walls billowed with a breeze entering through upper windows.

My uncle and my parents were seated at the table with the one they called the Teacher, and they all started in alarm when I entered the room.

"It's only me," I said.

My father said nothing, but rose and bolted the door. He then took me by the hand and led me to the table.

The stranger spoke. There was fear in his voice.

"They know I'm here. I cannot stay any longer."

"Yes, and they will be back," said Uncle Septimus.

"It's time then," said my father. He spoke the words almost as if passing sentence. He too knew fear, as did I then. A boy looks to his father for all things, and when his father is afraid he knows there is no protection. "There is something you must learn," he said.

Then the Teacher spoke again, and droned on about many strange things that I did not understand. Some of them sounded like the stories the Brown Man had told me, about a god who died and was born again, but in so many ways everything was stern and drab and different. Names I had never heard before, ideas completely strange. I admitted my confusion and the Teacher forced a smile.

"When you are older you shall understand these things. But there is no time now for further explanations." He glanced at the others and they nodded. I was taken over to the fountain and told to kneel. The Teacher took water in his hands and poured it over my head, while chanting some words. I assumed it was magic of some sort, although it was not as impressive as the magic of the Brown Man.

"Now you shall have eternal life. No one who has not been thus baptised can live forever." With that the stranger turned and departed. I never saw him again.

After he had gone I asked my father, "Am I really immortal now, because of that water?"

"Yes, your soul is. It is a wonderful thing."

"And can we make other people immortal, just by doing that?"

He saw my meaning. "We can. The Teacher wants us to. Have you a friend you want to baptise?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about him." There was genuine eagerness in my father's voice.

So I started to tell him about the Brown Man. I only started, because he never let me tell much. I told of our first meeting and began to describe the odd features of my friend, and as soon as I mentioned his wondrous, bestial

feet, my father grew angry.

"Don't say such things! You have seen a devil! Everything he told you is wicked! The old gods are false!"

"But - but I saw the old gods! He showed them to me."

My father would not listen to me. In fury he took up a rod and beat me until his rage was spent and he stalked off. I ran to my room and huddled in a corner, filled with pain and fear, unable to comprehend how I had offended, how my father could not have loved the Brown Man as I did. How could he say that the old gods were false? Had he not taken me to public sacrifices? How could he deny them now? I was terrified at the very idea, fearful that a wrath-filled Jupiter might strike us all down with thunderbolts for saying such things.

ONCE again a day dragged wearily to its conclusion, and each hour seemed like three. Arcadius came and tried to make me recite the forms of the Greek verbs, but I could not keep my mind on it and after a while he screamed at me in his shrill eunuch's voice, wrung his hands, and left. I watched all day as Apollo drove his chariot across the sky. Never before, it seemed, had his steeds run so slowly.

Still, evening did come at last, and with supper served and finished, I managed to evade my watchful father and steal away.

I ran across the fields, mind racing faster than feet, filled with countless questions I would ask of my friend. Yet I was afraid as I went, afraid that he would be angry at me for telling about him, afraid he would take revenge on my father for insulting the gods, afraid of many things.

Breathlessly, I passed through the trees and into the graveyard. Already shadows stretched long before the tombs and the sunward faces of the marble glowed red with the light of the dying day.

The Brown Man was there. I greeted him, but he drew away from me. He did not seem glad to see me, as he always had been before.

FANTASY TALES

"Is something the matter?"
He let out a loud wail. "No!
No! All is lost!"

"Please! Tell me what is wrong?"
He turned from me, as if the
sight of me filled him with horror.
"You are of the new god! You are
of the new god!" He turned and
fled.

"Wait! Come back!" I ran after
him.

He did not look behind him as
he went, faster and faster, out
of the graveyard, over rolling
fields. His howls of despair
echoed from the hills. I pressed
after him with all my strength
until that strength had gone and
my breath came in laboured pants,
and my feet felt like stone
weights, and the distance between
me and the Brown Man grew. I fell
over rocks, slid down hillsides,
until my clothing was ragged and
my sandals were gone, but soiled
and barefoot I continued after
him in vain. I could not catch
him, and when the last rays on
sunset faded he was a speck before

me, and the darkness swallowed him
up and I fell to the ground and
wept.

It was nearly dawn by the time
I got back to the villa. Father
and the servants had been out
looking for me, and when I was
found I got another beating. This
time I was locked in a cellar
room so that I would not run away,
and Arcadius and Gallus were sent
in to see to my studies. There
can be no torture greater than be-
ing locked in a room with those
two!

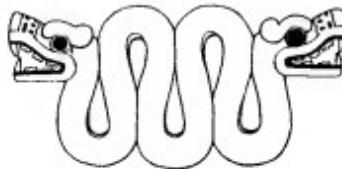
A few days later we left the
estate and returned to the city.
We never visited again. Something
happened to my uncle, but I was
never told what. I stayed in the
city for the rest of my childhood,
and eventually I learned what I
had to learn, but never again did
I dream wondrous dreams or see the
gods. The old stories seemed again
only lifeless stories. The Brown
Man came to me no more, and it
was only much later that I under-
stood what had happened.

Bone-Yowl

By STEVE ENG

SKULL-face above the camp-fire
White bone nailed to a stick,
Flames flaring like a lamp-spire:
Skull-face burns down like a wick.

Skull-face falls down and crashes,
Savage eyes see it fall,
Some hear it scream, in ashes:
Dead warrior's fierce last call.





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